

AN END OF THE HOURS

AN END
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THE HOURS

BY
EDWARD THOMPSON

'Thou makest an end of the hours'
THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

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TO
S. K. RATCLIFFE
WHO IS INTERESTED IN INDIA
AND IS MY FRIEND

PREFACE

I KNOW that whatever is said in a Preface will (as in the case of other crimes) be used against the sayer later. I will take the risk, having reached a place where whatever work remains for me is in outline clearly visible.

I was turned forty when I wrote An Indian Day, my first novel. It probably had a first novel's freshness; at any rate, it found a public. Its sequel, A Farewell to India, taking the same characters' story a stage further, found a larger one, coming out when everyone was writing 'farewells' (to Arms or to All That) and at the one juncture when my own people were interested in India, at the opening of the Round Table Conference.

This book, the last novel I shall write with an Indian setting, completes An Indian Day and A Farewell to India. It need not, and I hope will not, be taken to be autobiography (the common lot of fiction to-day), nor are opinions expressed in it necessarily mine. I think I have suffered from this misunderstanding more than most novelists, because of the passion which Indian questions arouse in India and in a restricted circle elsewhere. Nevertheless, into this book have passed some of the things seen and heard and thought in a thirty-years experience of the matters with which it deals. And so I make an end.

BOARS HILL,
July 1938.

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PART I

THE RETURN

CHAPTER I

I

ON every 'passage to India' there is some woman who talks rot in a loud voice.

She must be a colonel's wife, a number of men within earshot decided unjustly. A ghostly *entourage*—a reverent Silence of Subalterns—seemed to encompass her. No man had ever contradicted her. The man she was now instructing had no intention to be the first; he inclined his head in grave respectful agreement.

'If General Franco's men win—and personally I hope they will—for these Reds are so awful, aren't they?—and we have them in our own country, where the Communists and Radicals are out to do all they can to smash the Crown and Empire.'

She paused, and with a shade of half-anxiety asked, 'Do you think the Rio Tinto mines will be safe?'

That, after all, was the question. But of course they would be safe. Their safety was what General Franco was fighting for—one of the things he was fighting for. He was known to have immense admiration for British energy, ability, firmness, tenacity. He would hand back all its property intact to British business.

Robert Alden was grateful to the woman. He had not been grateful before ; her voice was too knife-like, too pervasive, too edged with gusto. She enjoyed her own charm and brightness too aggressively.

But now, bless her ! she had put matters where they belonged, and had placed his own wandering self in time and relationship. The hard clear outlines of the Indian world he had forsaken five years ago stood out again. Everything simplified.

He had left India, a man physically damaged and spiritually exhausted. Cambridge found him a small job, in such Oriental studies as English Universities possess, and he had entered a world where all things were open to discussion, and most things doubtful.

He was now returning to a world where two or three notions sufficed, and (being good notions, tested by many generations) did not need to be changed more than once in a century. A sigh of mild pleasure escaped him. He had been reminded of primal simplicities, on which the Empire is built.

She was discussing the one matter of perennial interest to her and her kind—titles and promotions. Some new Governor or other was in prospect.

‘Did you say Sir Walter was a *bigamist*?’ she asked, shocked.

‘No. A Wykehamist,’ said the man patiently. ‘You know, a man who was educated at Winchester.’

‘I’m glad they’re going back to the public schools. The last Governor had been at some potty grammar school.’

What a blessing and encouragement was this clear-voiced splendid woman!

I know your mechanism well-adjusted.

I see your mind and body have been trusted

To all the proper people. . . .

I see you are not old. . . .

I see you know the use of gold,

But also know the use of soap-and-water. . . .

remember that these are not Victorian times), and that really pricelessly funny, 'Please Stop Me' chap—after all this, the end of a perfect voyage, how jolly when everyone sang at the concert :

Oh, we're all growing older together !
But we'll keep as young as we can !

This is what gives us such a pull over other nations. We have a sense of humour. *And* we keep cheery. It's our sporting tradition that does it. Other nations haven't got this tradition.

3

The VOICE had come from the forward lounge. Turning round, from leaning on the rail to gaze seawards, Alden found beside him two other middle-aged men with whom he had formed a shipboard friendship. One of them, O'Connell, a thin grave Irishman, notable for the care with which he launched all statements—with the prelude of a long deep puff at his pipe and a slow deliberate kneading down of the tobacco with his thumb afterwards, as his tones simultaneously kneaded

down what he had to say,—jerked an elbow towards the Voice's possessor.

‘ Does it ever strike you English now, that there's folk in the world that *aren't English*, and that they sometimes *overhear* you ? ’

To Alden recurred memories of casual talk, since they had left Tilbury, nearly three weeks earlier, with various sorts of foreigners : Australians and New Zealanders, an American missionary, a Danish dancing-master. Two things seemed borne in upon him : that a new kind of silence was falling on men and women, as if speech were suddenly become something explosive and packed with peril, too full of uncertainties to be flung out in the old careless fashion. Outside the English world a watchfulness had entered faces. That outside world was looking at his people as it had never looked before.

Behind those masks men and women were asking questions. What action would the English take if this or that happened ? How much of strength, power, wisdom did this nation possess ? Were they just the world's prize bluffers ? And about to have that bluff called—in sight of gazing civilisation and

uncivilisation, with all the glaring notification of print and film and radio :

Cut off even in the blossoms of their sin,
Unhouselled, unanointed, unannealed,
No reckonings made, but sent to their account
With all their imperfections on their head ?

‘ I’ve seen her type—yes, and *heard* her type — my God ! but I’ve heard it ! ’ O’Connell continued, ‘ on every P. and O. for thirty years. I wonder now—and I’m asking *you*, Alden ! do you English ever *think* at all ? Or stand back from the rot you’ve just been talking, to try to see what it looks like to anyone who isn’t English ? ’

Hudson, the R.N. Captain now coffee-growing in the Shevaroy Hills, spoke in his gentle, patient manner. ‘ You mustn’t think we’re all military ! There are some of us who’ve knocked about, and talked to a few folk besides those in our own mess or gun-room.’

O’Connell ignored this. His pipe came out of his mouth again, and his pouch from his pocket. His thumb became busy in his pipe. ‘ Do they ever think now—I mean your Army folk—of the way it’s not what they

choose to call these Bolshies, but *they themselves*, that are splitting up the Empire? I've seen it, year after year, happening just as it's happening now. I always come round by sea the whole way—I've no use for these plaguy overland journeys! when I get on a vessel it's *there* that I stop till I reach my destination! So I come round Spain from London. And at Marseilles your Army gang come swarming in, and you are deafened by Poona belling and baying to Quetta, with Simla barking across them both. And they proceed to take charge of the ship. Then what happens? Why, if there happens to be a pretty girl who's not in their gang, *her* they co-opt into their charmed circle and annex her to it. But they've no manner of use for anyone else, no matter who or what he is! And I've seen the New Zealanders and Aussies, trip after trip, thinking to themselves about it. *And* I've heard them talking! If the Empire was won on the playing-fields of Eton, I can tell you where it's being lost, and that's between Tilbury and Bombay! Now *you* kindly explain to us, since you're fed and paid to understand and explain things, why these

fellows behave the way they do ! ’

‘ I think,’ said Alden reflectively, ‘ they once had some right on their side.’

‘ In what way—right ? To treat the rest of the world as sub-social ! ’

‘ Because for generations the rest of us paid a handful of our people to do the dirty work of being killed—or killing others.’

The Irishman saw this. ‘ Quite,’ he admitted, digging hard at his pipe. ‘ You had a small professional officer class over a rank and file largely composed of fellows who couldn’t get any work or maybe didn’t much want to get any—any that you could *call* work, anyway. And that’s why conscription’s right, if you have war at all. Everyone should take a share in the job of getting killed or maimed or blinded. But what used to happen in good Queen Vic’s reign is no justification for what these chaps do now ! For everyone knows that when the next war starts we shall all be in it to the neck, from the word *Go* ! And these fellows will get the staff jobs straight off, by right of seniority and training ! All they’ll have to do will be to draw up the damn silly plans that’ll make the big butchers’ bills that

the rest of us'll have to foot ! And to do all the exciting miscellaneous dining and wining and intriguing together ! It's the civilians that now are that'll be in the trenches ! The professional soldiers will merely collect the ribbons and write the memoirs afterwards, when the rest of us are all dead or on crutches. But now let's forget these blisters and have a game ! '

The Irishman, already pleasantly detached in spirit from the rest of the Empire, felt mildly victorious.

4

They collected a fourth player for deck tennis, but had to wait for a court. The Royal Family were playing.

The ship possessed three colonels and two colonels' ladies, one of the latter travelling without her husband. They fed together, they chatted together, they played an occasional stately game together, and the ship had nicknamed them resentfully. Two colonels and one lady were playing the present game, one against two. The lady played excessively badly. But it would have been wrong to

bring in either a subaltern or one of the baser civilians, and the ship's Member of Council was not available. The game dragged on, therefore, lamely and grotesquely—like the swaying of a gilded door which has had one hinge torn off. Waiting and watching made the Irishman very very happy.

Two subalterns passed the waiting watching four. One had built up his whole person into aggressive expression of that self which he adored devoutly, and believed the outside world must adore devoutly. Eyes and bearing were insolently brainless, and eyes were perpetually wandering for admiration. A cigarette-holder of portentous length was always in his mouth, tilted upwards. If we carry an aura his must have been a tanager scarlet, for he left this impression on other men, who almost without exception detested him. Yet in her inscrutable purpose Nature must have given the type some race-value, for women flocked to him.

The other subaltern was very different. Alden surmised a country rectory as his background. He had come on him by himself in a corner of an empty lounge, studying

papers sent him by some correspondence course whose work he had taken while on the Frontier. They had had some talk, and Alden knew that his ambition was the Staff College.

How he managed to study it was hard to understand. He worked apparently unceasingly for the ship's amusements, of which he was secretary. His manner was light, but his spirit knit and watchful. He was in the line of another tradition, which from generation to generation has survived unobtrusively alongside of the Kipling subaltern and the musical comedy colonel.

The watchers' eyes lifted angrily from his companion ; then they softened. The Irishman spoke. ' That boy there—I mean young Grant, not the blister who's poisoning the air beside him——'

' He's a gunner,' said the R.N. Captain. Irrelevantly. But you understood that the Senior Service claimed him as working on its own scientific plane.

O'Connell, with just the faintest note of rebuke, continued : ' What a pity now ! what a heart-breaking pity ! that subalterns like

him have to turn into majors and colonels, when they'll forget all they learnt—or half learnt—in the days when other chaps could sometimes contradict them ! '

They got their game at last, Royalty retiring exhausted. Three days later, the ship reached Bombay, and its British occupants vanished over India, each to his own watertight compartment. It was like the scattering of a dream. For life on board ship *is* a dream. Nowhere else are you at such leisure and in such continual intimacy with others. No other experience vanishes so completely, and leaves so little behind.

CHAPTER II

I

ALDEN had been put on a Commission to report on changing conditions in India as they affected Christian Missions. Taking off a couple of terms from his work at Cambridge, he chose to come out ahead of his colleagues. He was not to be allowed to loaf ; his old College, at Vishnugram in Bengal, hearing of his plans, had persuaded him to help them through the later autumn. The College was short-handed because of illness that had recalled two of the European staff to England.

The rains still haunted the skirts of the mountains, and Bombay steamed unpleasantly. At the Customs barrier he saw his late companions disperse ; with their going went also his own illusion of warm, hearty reality. It was like the withdrawing of light from the day or blood from the body. With the

draining away of that rich communal existence he was a ghost confronting—what? in an India which he had not seen for these five years.

He was confronting, it seemed to him, such a swamp of drabness and physical wretchedness as he did not know was in the world. Yet this was Bombay, not the worst or lowest populace in the land ; compared with Calcutta, it was as Kensington to Naples. He knew this, and, knowing it, wondered how the flicker of life kept burning at all, in bodies so wasted and eyes which might be young in years (he was in the University purlieus, and a crowd of students slowly drifted by his taxi) but were tired before life's work had started.

Then he understood. It was not that this world had worsened, it was only that appearance, from which all of us draw so much that we imagine is ours, had grown thin and unconvincing. So had the world within himself. Once it had flung a bright mist about his seeing, in which happiness was heightened ; it was misery then that took on shades of unreality. ' We receive but what we give ' ;

his mind now took back this show of being, stripped of the glow that once accompanied all perception.

He had to travel inland. His luggage deposited at the station, he walked to a hotel for the day. A gentleman moved along the pavement distributing printed sheets. He thrust one into Alden's hand. 'Talkies Worth Talking About !' They were, it appeared, *Love Nest, Ghoul, Pride of Force*, supported by 'alluring sinister' minor frolics : 'Smashing Box-Office Hits'—'A Symphony of Emotions with a Galaxy of Stars'—and *Night-Bird*, providing 'Baffling Murder Soul-Stirring Mystry—Heartless Cruelty Enacted in a Dangerously Human Touch.' Hollywood in Indian Clothes : a marriage of East and West at last and indeed.

Everywhere placards stared him in the face. 'Rs. 50,000 MUST be WON !'

It was to be won by gauging film stars' importance, in the rank which Demos assigned them. The differences were dying, a communal dream united the countries and peoples.

That evening at the station bookstall he searched for some reading matter not too extravagantly imbecile, knowing he should not find it. Resigning himself, he bought the only English weekly there. 'The Love-bug,' he learnt, 'has been very busy in Hollywood.' The world was discussing why a much-married male star had installed a turkish bath and room complete with punching-ball and ping-pong table next to the similar annexe owned by a still-more-married female star. Between the apartments, it was whispered (but coyly denied), was a sliding panel door.

Christmas was going to be in fashion at Beverly Hills, and the dear old carols ('how they catch at the heart, don't they—despite higher taxes and changing times and all the problems that you and I know so well!') were being practised already in a setting of holly and mistletoe (imported). 'Big Boys' Sweetheart' was particularly impressive in 'O Come, All Ye Faithful!'

A fat Indian gentleman was also studying this news from civilisation's front. His wife

beside him, he sat on a bench, munching syrup-dripping sweets.

The magazine was mainly concerned, however, not with carols but with the news that ROMANCE had come A SECOND TIME to a certain male star. Every woman was excited to know this. You, said the paper (the fat gentleman's wife peered over his shoulder)—YOU NOW READING THESE WORDS, whoever and wherever you are—slum serf or duchess peacocking it wherever duchesses do peacock it—YOU, if you are THE DESTINED WOMAN, MUST FALL to him, twist and dodge and duck and hide as you may ! HE WILL SURELY HAVE YOU, so resign yourself to become the Envied of All Nations (for a time) ! Immense would be the ecstasy of discovery and rapture ! And duly published for a palpitating world.

And so, thought Alden, civilisation dies down, and we reel back to—not the beast, but something far below the beast. For the beast world has its sane and quiet seasons. Man, it seems, has none. He is a swirl of passions, a maelstrom of idiocy. Male and female they were created, to be daft in one way—and nothing else.

3

He found himself thinking of the most important medium for forming the thought of millions since printing was invented, and saw the similitude of themselves which the nations were giving abroad. He found himself wondering how much of the contempt now felt for his own people and for their kindred in America was because of this composite picture of themselves which they themselves had sown over the world. This portrait was not of the face that had been seen in a Gladstone or Lincoln. What the world saw was a face heavily cunning or portentous—twisted in wry, eternal, wise-cracking gamin self-consciousness.

How much it wronged the hard-working millions of his own country and of America he knew. But he knew also that brazen-tongued silliness, like the brazen-tongued official savagery of totalitarian lands, created increasingly the image of itself in those on whom it worked. And knew also how the ripples of scorn and anger spread widely to the earth's ends.

As the man who is every minute and all his minutes facetious is utterly wearisome to all others, so was mankind finding this vision of the peoples who held themselves to be its leaders and the pattern on which civilisation should mould itself—a vision utterly and intolerably wearisome.

‘Depend upon it, sir, no man was ever written down except by himself!’ Not true, of course ; not true at all. Yet how much the most effective detractor of himself is each man, and each nation of itself! How sure are the troubled totalitarian administrations that for the growing coldness of the outside world hostile propaganda, of Jew or crafty Briton, is solely responsible—not seeing the black increasing shadow spread by themselves and their own deliberate, boastful story of themselves! And how much of that peril in which now move England and America is a demon conjured up by their own actions!

‘I remembered,’ Alden wrote to Frances, ‘what a missionary told me on the boat. He had been showing movies to a tribe lost in a remote Himalayan valley. He showed them

a cart drawn by an ox, and it stumped them completely ! They had never seen one, and could not understand how a bulk could be dragged forward on wooden disks ! This bothered him a lot, for he had aeroplanes to follow. But bless you ! *these* they took in their stride ! They knew all about planes, having seen them often, gliding over their valleys. *They had skipped a whole civilisation*, from neolithic man lurching flat-footedly forward by his own power, burden on back, to aeroplanic man ! Well, that's what this age has done, with whole sections of humanity ! It has clean skipped the reading stage, and got to where everything comes to it through flicks and radio alone.

'And for me, a representative of this English civilisation which is dying out, with every nation of the world apparently willing to hasten our dying, it is interesting to realise where we stand. When I look at the flood of sheerly infantile stuff that Hollywood has put across us—with complete success—so that our own idiots now merely imitate and try to go one sillier—and when I contrast it with the kind of thing we should have produced if left

to ourselves—something no doubt dull and stodgy and stately, but at any rate above this gibbering ROMANCE clatter—I realise that it's the Time-Spirit who wants us to go, and not merely Mussolini and Hitler. We are definitely 'older' than the Americans, as the Egyptians Solon met were older than the Athenians, as the Athenians were older than Alexander's Macedonians, as the people of the Continent were older than our own Elizabethans. And what the world takes for just weakness in our Government and imbecility in our film magnates and authors and Book Societies is merely senility. We've fallen into a drowse, the drowse of old age—which is wise enough when it wakes up enough to speak at all, and can throw out a flash of light from its long experience, but for the most part is content to sit by the ingle-nook sipping at its ale and its memories. The Americans revel in this thought of human beings on the rampage, of ROMANCE chasing selected specimens and possible to all of us if we only take the right foods and right dopes, and ward off 'halitosis' and unmentionable (leastways, they *ought* to be unmentionable) disabilities. The Germans

and Italians revel in blood and bullying, and in the thought that they will one day spread them through the world. And the English merely watch in a tired fashion ! Not because we are better, but because we are aged and worn-out. We've had our day, a day when we once did likewise—strutted across the boards with Tamerlane and dealt lavishly in All for Love and Plenty for Death, in Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet and masked murderers and poison and 'Tis Pity She's what she hadn't ought to have been, ever, and Duchesses of Malfi—or sailed in and smashed Copenhagen in good piratical manner and went goose-stepping into Afghanistan or Sind. But it's all over, and we are wise and reasonably good ! So the Time-Spirit is interested in younger, naughtier children.'

But that was later reflection.

4

In his carriage now, he sat full length on a seat by the window, to watch the slow, dull pageant.

'*Saheb !*'

A child was offering packets of chocolate for sale.

It was warm September. Alden knew what these packets—melted and then dried again, and then once more melted ; and altogether inedible—would be like inside.

‘ *Saheb !* ’ The boy continued his pleading.

He was such a mere baby : his eyes bright, eager ; his body faultless ; his manners gentle. The Englishman bought a packet, and added largess, so felt he had done his duty.

Not so the child ; he continued his pestering. And Alden was mildly vexed that even at his tender years he should not know the rules. Once you had bought his stuff and given him two annas for himself, he ought to leave you as a prey to other persecutors. He told the boy to go.

The child not going, but clinging earnestly to his compartment, Alden paid some attention to what he was saying. It clustered round and round a word he did not recognise : ‘ *Kopon ! Kopon ! Kopon !* ’

He kept on pointing to the packet in Alden’s hand, and comprehension began to dawn. As Alden opened the packet, childish

eyes lit up, and he seemed about to climb through the window in his excitement. Alden gave him the coupon, and was shown a large pile collected already. He was very touched. Here was a baby toiling far into the night (there were no trades union hours for him !), amassing coupons for which he would get—what ? a fountain pen ? a walking-stick cunningly decorated ? Anyway, something for nothing (and how jolly that is !). He placed a hand on the boy's head, and blessed him. The boy smiled back gratefully, salaamed, and went.

The last shock was to come. Alden bought a newspaper, and idly glancing through it learnt that what the chocolate boy would get ultimately, in exchange for a dense wad of coupons, was portraits of a dozen Western glamour girls (one Indian lady thrown in, to give local colour and local appeal).

He visualised the hut devoid of elementary amenities : the rag where the child slept when day's work was over, head swathed against mosquitoes ; the dull, unvarying food. Presently, beside the sleeper's mat the film queens would smirk, behind a wick that

wavered in an earthen saucer of oil. Perhaps before them would be a cluster of sweet-breathing jasmine, or spray of blood-hued hibiscus, such as in less sophisticated days the boy might have stuck under some fearsome bazaar print of Kali.

Benares was yielding to Hollywood ; Mecca was tumbling to the touch of the cuties. India was in the Modern Age at last ; she had caught up with Progress. In India—mystic unchanging ‘ spiritual ’ India—a little boy was about to slay her ancient cultures. He had found something to tell his Commission when they arrived !

Wryly glancing at himself, prisoner in a time when even our tragic moments are grotesque and without dignity, Alden remembered Renan’s comments on St. Paul wandering alone through Athens, and feeling his spirit stirred within him to see such a city given up wholly to idolatry. ‘ Beautiful gods and goddesses ! true gods and goddesses ! the word of this ugly little Jew is going to prove your destruction ! ’ It was gratuitously offensive to assume that Paul was ugly, it was unnecessary to assert that the Hermae and

Priapi were so true and so lovely. That might pass, however. The point was that Robert Alden, old and disheartened, a unit of that generation which has seen all its dreams and visions scattered, like St. Paul was destined wherever he went to see city after city wholly given up to idolatry. And, unlike the Apostle, he could not encourage himself with the hope that this idolatry was doomed. It was itself the destined slayer of all idolatries before it.

CHAPTER III

TRAVELLING at leisure eastwards, he saw by starts and glimpses something of the new India which perhaps his Commission would miss. In a great Mahratta city he called on an old friend, now damned as a 'Moderate' (and therefore by swift equation a sycophant, a traitor, a time-server). As from behind bars a doomed prisoner looks this man looked at Alden, and one thing that he said revealed all. 'Between midnight and dawn I am the loneliest man in India.' It is not in the West only that alignments have stiffened, and you must strangle the thought within you, and loudly proclaim yourself as of one extreme or its opposite.

In a train luncheon carriage he met a Dominion statesman touring the world. They made friends, and saw together Ajanta and Ellora. At Ajanta, in the caves, drawing the Englishman suddenly aside, with a sweep of

his arm round the glorious frescoes the statesman said, ' The impression I get is of a happy existence. Yet the impression I have got passing through India is of one seething misery from end to end ! Am I right ? Or are these pictures wrong ? '

Alden looked at the frescoes, and saw what he meant. They represented, as no other pictures have ever represented, human life with all of passion and suffering sublimed away from it. They showed action in its manifold forms, without the strain and agony that go with it.

The statesman went on. ' Your people—I mean, your official people—have been good to me. Wherever I've gone they've been careful to stress the excellent relations obtaining in this darned country, and I've been allowed to watch hand-picked Indians gambolling together with selected British ! But it's all been a lie ! Can't you folk *see* that everyone who comes here from the outside world *can see that it's a lie* ? And not a clever lie, either ! '

This deep, lovely valley, its rocky side pitted with the caverns where the saffron-robed ascetics who made these calm, gracious

frescoes lived in the morning of time, reminded them that, hidden by the new blatant India, lived on ancient peaceful India. The soul of a land does not altogether slip away, so long as visible memorials remain.

CHAPTER IV

I

ON his way to Vishnugram Alden stayed overnight in Calcutta.

Hamar, his brother-in-law, was on leave, and there were few Europeans whom he knew. He looked up a brace of youngsters in the Services, whose fathers had been his friends.

His own roots went into pre-War years, when men talked in easy uninhibited fashion. Neither 'right wing' nor 'left wing' had been thought of; the world had not begun to split into groups who worshipped blood-stained gods, whether of Moscow or of Nazi and Fascist. Freedom had been the use and custom. Sir Nicholas Headley, for example—that swift-speaking, swift-handed Member of Council, whose political views were pre-Mutiny—had been in cheerful daily concord with Congress wallahs.

The new atmosphere, he found, was silence ; and in that silence, watchfulness. Uncertainty, in a world not analysed, but felt to be up to no good. The two young gentlemen had developed double chins at twenty-five ; and as they eyed their aged acquaintance across their desks he saw that their hearts had waxed fat with *clichés*. They had been out long enough to realise that he was a dangerous influence, and his name better suppressed from their official dossier. The old breezy acceptance of disagreement was gone. Sir Nicholas himself would now be suspected, and his mails examined.

He left them, and entered Chowringhee, Calcutta's main street. It was packed with humanity more than excited—resilient to the point of rampant glee. *Tupi kider gya?* ('Where has my hat gone?')—the bare-headed equestrian warrior reining his stone horse in, and gazing back suspiciously towards the chemist's shop behind him—now looked down on something more important than a wind-ravished sun-helmet.

On the *maidan* the gigantic Victoria Memorial and the tall thin finger of the Ochterlony

Monument showed up greyly insignificant, set in a world now thoroughly awake to their alien character. The patient British police sergeants and officers were striving to keep open a route—for what ?

For something that was very far from being anxious to keep open a route for the distant Power for which they stood !

Drums shattered, pipes skirled, flutes whistled. A bodyguard of boys dressed scout-fashion marched by. Behind came a group of youths on horseback. Then a solitary Indian girl, riding a spirited chestnut pony. Accoutred as a *sowar* and wearing a turban, she rode alone. No race in the world is less equestrian than the Bengali, and even to-day there is only one family whose women ever appear on horseback on the Calcutta *maidan*. Alden noticed this girl therefore.

She was worth notice in herself. But the tumultuous pleasure of the crowd, which seemed to find in her something symbolic and stirring, drew attention also.

In her dress and manner, in the graceful conscious bravado with which she managed her troubled animal and acknowledged the

plaudits, there was something that dimly shone down corridors of recollection. Where had he seen her? Was it in a book or in life? Not that there is anything unusual—in any other country—in a pageant containing a pretty girl on a fine horse. Yet Alden felt there was something present besides the willingness to give and accept aesthetic delight.

Paraders and musicians and riders gone by, a car came slowly driving, inside a body-guard of marching Indian ladies. In the car rode the President of the National Congress. Calcutta—the Englishman's creation out of swamp and floods—was welcoming Jawaharlal Nehru.

From a cloud emerged a sunray, and sent a piercing flash into the eyes of Tupi Kider Gya. He seemed to forget his swept-off helmet and to concentrate his gaze on the white-capped, white-robed figure with the grave face and solemnity of an Englishman from grey northern fells. Tupi Kider Gya questioned this apparition from elsewhere. In *his* time Indians held no processions, except for weddings or funerals. No one had dared to

skirl pipes in the streets except when corpses were borne to their pyres ! What were the *parawallahs* and *sipahis* doing to permit such seditious nonsense ! Worst of all, what were those white-tunic'd sahebs doing ? Had they forgotten that they were fellow-countrymen of Nikal Seyn ? ‘ O for another hour of that Dundee ! ’

It may have been because the President's eyes met Kider Gya's (and, Alden remembered, Nehru has an Englishman's sense of irony, his humour moves in the grim, slow-glinting manner of our own folk), or, more likely, it was just a fluke that it happened, but the grave unIndian face lit up with the smile which has won half its possessor's victories. You think you are with a bigot. And no wonder, if you have the imagination to put yourself inside his memories ! Never mind what you may think of his opinions or activities ! Remember that some power not ourselves chooses our race and country and circumstances, and that suffering is always suffering ! Yet suddenly there is a smile which somehow or other manages to be without the least shadow of self-consciousness, and you

know that if this man is a bigot then he ought not to have been made one.

2

That evening, as in years past, Alden walked on the *maidan*, 'As a shadow blown with shadows.'

In the old days, at the keening of the kites strung on those invisible wires far aloft, something of the impersonal passivity of eternity to which he was hastening would have gripped and exhilarated him. As he walked, a lonely watching figure, his own unimportance and detachment would have been a strength, moving through these grey unimportant phantasms which even in life (unlike the Englishman, who carries so deceptive an appearance of solidity) were such obvious apparitions—quietly dimly talking together in low tones—quietly dimly drifting their homeward ways.

Now even the immemorial sounds of the heavens aloft had changed. The kites' shrill keening, which once accompanied every hour of day, seemed faint and uninsistent, almost

intermittent. The trees were dustier and dimmer, the earth greyer and drabber than he remembered. The people more numerous, and duller and mattering less. 'And I said, This is mine own infirmity. I will remember the days of Thy right hand.'

Those days had gone from earth for ever.

The Ochterlony Monument was a ghost that might fold itself up like a dust-cloud and tenuously vanish. It was not much more than a century since the brave old chap had carried his gout and broken spirits off from Delhi to die in the presence of his thirteen wives. His brilliant and successful young friend, Charles Metcalfe, 'my dear son Charles,' had presided (in this city) over the meetings which collected money for this remarkable memorial. What foreigner could have eternal right in India if not David Ochterlony—the boy who had left his place in Canada, never to return, but to live out fifty-three years as an Asiatic, a Raja among lesser Rajas and Nawabs? And yet (to Alden wandering lonely by it) his Monument seemed less substantial than music heard in a dream.

As at such moments many thoughts will crowd in upon the mind, Alden remembered also Thomas Babington Macaulay, one-time Member of the Supreme Council. Sheer brain had sojourned in this City of Palaces, and had ruled over this nation of excitement and sentimentalism. 'I contented myself with being very civil whenever I was with the other passengers, and took care to be with them as little as I could.' That was the right spirit! Not merely the right Imperial spirit! it was the right spirit in which to pass over the Ocean of Existence! 'Except at meals, I hardly exchanged a word with any human being. . . . I came hither principally to save my family'; and the thought that he could make a fortune honestly, inside of five years, reconciled him 'to all the pains—acute enough, sometimes, God knows,' of exile in Calcutta.

Anyway, he had been enabled to write those Essays on Clive and Warren Hastings which have given such vexation. Remembering them, Alden wondered if it were true that this green wide space had been covered with terror-stricken Hindus rushing to plunge

in Ganges and wash off the guilt of having been in the same world and same minute as a Brahmin's execution !

He himself, he presently discovered, was in the same world and same hour as a football cup final. Mohammedan Sporting were playing against some kind of Hindu United ; it appeared that on the football field Hindus *could* be united. Seat after seat, tier on tier, and an immense stretching waste besides, was crammed with craning-necked and bellowing-voiced humanity. ' *Make* a goal ! ' ' Ooooh ! very nice ! ' ' Well shoot ! ' ' NNNNNOOOOOOWWWWW, Abdul ! '

Abdul in response to brazen-throated entreaty made a bosh shot of it ; and a wail went up, compared with which the lament for Nanda Kumar murdered must have been a twitter of bats. With the wail mingled exultation's sterner note, from Hindu United in ecstasy.

Alden had to make a detour of a full half mile. ' At a conservative estimate,' at least five thousand ' spectators ' were occupying public space, without the slightest hope of ever seeing a player or the ball, except when

an exceptionally lofty kick broke into the heaven of heavens, drawing the eyes of the multitude upwards after it.

3

Catching the night train to Vishnugram, he found Howrah station, as of old, crammed with humble folk lying patiently on their household goods until such time as the platforms were opened to the proletariat. Hither and thither skedaddled smaller groups—after all these years of railways convinced that trains were shy and furtive wild creatures, that had no settled haunt or habitat, but *might*—with luck—be caught hiding—anywhere. When you caught them you must board them swiftly, before they could escape!

‘India’ also—India as he had known it, in his far-off hopeful youth, when flowers had dew in their cups and mystery was blown along the dust-clouded roads—was lurking somewhere; he would doubtless see her again, somewhere and in some hour of unveiling. But now all that he saw was the

depressing squalor of a mob herded into tiny space ; this, and the drab cloak of pseudo-modernity flung over the scene.

‘ And so,’ he wrote to his wife, ‘ this shadow-self of an Oriental within me, my “ Cumbrian soul in Indian feathers ”—

As the king-bird, with ages on his plumes,
Travels to die in his ancestral glooms—

now flees, like the cony to where she was kindled, to Vishnugram, where you and I lived in an earlier, long-vanished incarnation. And there—before I jerk myself awake for my Commission—I shall enter on the last phase of this Indian dream of mine ! I foresee it as a kind of sleep-walking, varied by an occasional spasm of the old fierce wandering. For the rest, I plan to be much by myself :

Some dragon, whom his rocky hold
Makes feared and talked of more than seen.

‘ When a man has known a landscape as I have known the one to which I am going, and has taken it into his blood and brain, God should allow him to abide in it for eternity. But he merely lets our lives pass

over it, as the shadow of a cloud passes over a field.

The bird, the flower, shall gather still.
Thy voice shall cease upon the hill ! ’

The train started at last, and bore him to Vishnugram.

CHAPTER V

I

IN the grey pre-dawn hour Vishnugram station appeared as he remembered it—the solitary peepul as tremulous and tall, the wooden bridge as gaunt and skeleton-like, the platform the same wind-and-dust-swept length of emptiness, its tiny cluster of central office buildings unchanged.

Jyoti Babu, the old somnolent night clerk, was carrying his eternal lantern. He nearly dropped it when he confronted Alden ; his delight and affection were genuine and obvious. ‘ I always say to all and sundry, “ He is very good man ! Just like our own priests ! ” ’

The tribute always recalled an occasion when it had given small pleasure to Alden’s former colleague Jacks. Jacks had returned from Calcutta, in this same pre-dawn hour, to find that there was some technical flaw

in his ticket. The date was smudged, so far as Alden could remember, and a new and officious stationmaster attempted to make him pay double fare with a five rupees 'fine.' It was provided for such cases, it seemed, in the Regulations. Jacks had been held prisoner until word reached his Superior, who cycled down to release him. Alden had found Jyoti Babu deeply shocked by the stationmaster's action, so much so that, instead of having retired to his meal and rest, he was still murmuring, 'He is very good man. Just like our own priests !' Alden had settled the matter in his own high-handed fashion—the high-handed fashion of the old high-handed days—but the sting of that comparison he had been unable to eradicate.

He ought to have wired that he was coming. In that case, he would have been met. He had not wired, for that very reason. Why drag another man out of bed at this unearthly hour ? He set off to walk the well-remembered mile of bazaars, and the second mile of open country beyond, until he reached the College.

From now until the end he was walking

through old memories, like a ghost in a city which has been utterly forsaken. No other mind knew what he knew or could share his thoughts. He preferred to savour them alone, as the day came to its dawning. He was on his native heath, and his name was McGregor.

2

He came on the Principal, the Rev. John McCormick, at *chota hazri* with his wife, on a veranda of College House. They were aghast that he had walked, with no one to welcome him at the station.

‘ Why did you not let us have a wire ? The College were planning to meet you with a procession. They will be terribly upset and disappointed ! ’

A nice chap, McCormick, but fussy under his responsibilities. Alden realised his qualities in the first five minutes, and decided to let fussiness run itself out of breath. If he did this the two of them could be good colleagues for their brief time together.

After he had shared their *chota hazri*, and quieted McCormick’s distress, kind motherly

Kate McCormick took him to his room and left him to himself.

He lay down to rest, night having been broken by the train journey. Rest did not come at once, or easily. Crows were busy on a veranda, prying into this hole and that—though they must know by heart every inch of the region. He listened to their hopping and furtive rustle as they alighted or flew off. Squirrels and mynas also seemed to consider they had business there.

But he dozed off at last, and felt that old age was claiming the body that had always assumed it could never be weary.

Old age ; and that world of dreams and recollection that was now waiting at all times behind the eyes, to seize its chance to return when once those eyes closed on the teasing world before them. He found himself wondering if, when his eyes shut for ever, that inner world would prove itself the only reality, and take possession—an eternity of life which nothing should put to sleep again.

He was back in *sephali*-fragrant autumns, when the morning strewed the forest walks with golden-centred stars and on the sals and

wild mango trees the redness of new leaves thrust up. He was not thinking of the College at all, or his work there, but of the first years of wandering and wide-ranging exploration, when he and Findlay had toured the Orissa highlands in a month of pouring rain, madmen that they were ! reckless in the confidence of bodies that could cast off cold and heat and tiredness, a confidence superbly justified. Why should he dream of such things now ? When he knew in every limb that his strength was on the long steady ebb, and when his friend was a wraith or a legend, hardly known to his own folk ! Why should he find himself back in that rocky watercourse, climbing that Orissan hill as dusk was beginning ? And should hear that frightening dull roaring, which told them a tiger was on the same mountain ?

The roar shook him out of uneasy slumber, and his limbs jerked together, in the uncomfortable way they will when our dream itself is of such a kind as to awaken us. His eyes opened.

Alden looked at his watch and saw that the College would soon be starting. He rose

,

and bathed and dressed. When the bell sounded he crossed the compound to the lecture rooms. He entered one and told the Indian Professor he would take over. After five years he reassumed his old task of expounding English poetry. He heard a rustle of pleasurable expectation. He knew (and the class knew that he knew) what students desired.

CHAPTER VI

I

THAT knowledge, however, had not come originally of itself. When Alden had reached Vishnugram first—nearly thirty years ago !—in the zeal and zest of a young man's imagination, his students had found him a nuisance.

Enlightenment had come, and he had mended his ways. His instruction had begun his very first morning. In the office of Douglas, his Chief, he had made the acquaintance of the first two B.A. candidates of the College. Their course was over and they were filling in examination forms.

After introducing the new professor, Douglas had observed, ' Mr. Alden will be glad to help you in his spare time, if you have any difficulties with Tennyson.' Douglas did not himself spend much time on Tennyson. He was a scientist, from Cambridge.

‘Something about the SYMBOLICAL Meaning,’ said both candidates simultaneously, with an explosive gusto on ‘Symbolical’ which Alden would remember to his dying day.

He had undertaken to help them with the SYMBOLICAL Meaning, and it was then that he had begun to realise his inadequacy. He had liked Tennyson, but (it appeared) not the Tennyson which Calcutta University set for its examinations. He had read the *Idylls of the King* ; but had read them as attempts at poetry, a cunning if monotonously manipulated filigree of silver English, with occasional passages of genuine golden metal. This, he now learnt, had been all wrong. They were an elaborate puzzle. Arthur was ‘Soul,’ and everyone else was pieced into some sort of jerry-built scaffolding. His first pupils had found him lacking in philosophic depth, had been shocked by his impatience with what after all was the essential thing, the matter which the examiners would probe, the SYMBOLICAL Meaning. They had proved quite right. The first question had turned out to be, ‘Arthur is SOUL. Discuss this

statement, in its bearing upon the Symbolical Meaning of *Merlin and Vivien*.'

Enlightenment had continued. Sallying out in the zest of his newness—Douglas, knowing that the stream would quieten all too soon, was too wise to check it—Alden had voluntarily taken in hand the Intermediate Arts Class, who were not his official business. They were reading Macaulay's Essays on Addison and Clive.

He did not care much about Addison, but he read the Essay and gutted it paragraph by paragraph, making a *précis*. What does Macaulay say of this ? and that ? He did not notice his achievement at the time, but he stripped the whole Essay to its skeleton. This paper he stuck on a public board, and three wide-eyed admiring students called on him.

'Sir ! those questions you gave on Macaulay's *Addison* showed much intelligence !'

Alden bowed his thanks.

'Sir !'

'Yes ?'

'Do you think you could make questions on Macaulay's *Clive* that would show equal

intelligence ? And grasp of subject involved ? ’

‘ I will try. ’

The visitors rose to go. But they felt their expression of appreciation had been inadequate. Evidently this new professor was going to prove a treasure.

‘ Sir ! ’

‘ Yes ? ’

‘ Those questions on Macaulay’s *Addison*——’

‘ Yes ? ’

‘ Were very intelligent. ’

‘ *Most* intelligent. ’

‘ Showing firm grasp of subject-matter and problems involved. ’

In a short time, therefore, Alden had learnt his way. Confronted by blankly puzzled faces and some pertinacious dullard’s question, instead of wasting time by explaining what was in Milton’s or Shakespeare’s mind he would say, ‘ Take your pens and write. ’

And a sigh of grateful relief had always gone up. The passage they had come to was incomprehensible, was probably wash or tosh. But then poetry was that in any case ; and this was poetry written, not in sonorous

involved Sanskrit, with word and phrase, innuendo and allusion, tumbling and intertwined with one another endlessly, but in the bleak crisp unlovely speech of those islanders whom Providence had mysteriously thrust upon India. Anyway, Alden Saheb was going to give them a texture of words which, if they learnt it by heart, would be accepted by Calcutta University examiners as an authorised paraphrase. That was the purpose of poets when they wrote poetry : to set down with teasing obscurity what someone else afterwards could so express that it made some sort of sense. Not really *good* sense—but then, it is a law of nature that you cannot make silken purses out of pigs' ears. But sense of a sort.

2

All that was nearly thirty years ago. And five years of teaching in a Western country are enough to unfit even the dullest to teach in an Indian College. They had utterly unfitted Alden, as he was to discover.

This first day of return he pulled himself together, and confronted rows of vacuity

steeled to endure what must be endured if you sit for Calcutta University examinations. Vacuity was studying *Paradise Lost*. Alden's spirit, always so wild and wandering a spirit, was without warning set in a world of

Trembling leaves, while universal Pan,
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance,
Led on the eternal Spring. Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
Was gathered (which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world). . . .

He began to talk about the Eleusinian Mysteries, and all they meant: and how, by a dozen words that suppressed themselves into one sentence that walked through imagination's woods and dales—

Which cost Ceres *all that pain*
To seek her through the world—

Milton had set memory's night ablaze with torch and procession. *All that pain*—the fairest and loveliest story of antiquity, with all that it meant to Socrates and Julian, and all that it means to imaginative minds yet, had been packed into perfect simplicity !

His Guardian Angel, listening not altogether unsympathetically, but knowing the weeks that lay before his charge, to carry whose burden passion and power of feeling must be kept unsquandered, arranged an interruption that would shake him back to sanity. The rains' last sporadic spillings quickened into a shower, and with loud bleating protestations a mob of goats, all of them dwarfish and ridiculously tuft-bearded, all of them female and all of them pregnant, rushed into the room, a tripping patter of tiny feet.

Alden laughed and said good-humouredly, 'But there ! I know you all think I have just been wasting your time !'

They did all think that ; and he knew it. With Oriental courtesy they had been waiting until Alden Saheb (of whom they had heard such legends, not merely of his madness—he was not only the *Bhut*, he was often the *Pagol Saheb*, the Reckless or Mad Saheb—but also of his skill and deftness in nailing elusive poetry into memorisable prose paraphrases) had finished behaving foolishly. However, a student in the front seats remarked, kindly

and soothingly, 'No, it has all been very *amusing*.'

For the fraction of a moment Alden felt annoyed as well as chagrined. Then he remembered that 'amusing' once meant merely 'interesting,' that it is still apt to mean that in America, and that American Colleges have transplanted many transatlantic survivals to India in the English they have taught there. He therefore laughed again, and was pleased that his comforter had managed to say in one word so much more than he intended.

From the back row came a sterner voice :
'It is NOT IN THE SYLLABUS.'

The rebuke was justified, the speaker entirely right. It was *not* in the Syllabus, to show those deep majestic shadows into which a poet's thought goes back, traversing the ages and the accumulated memories of all mankind.

So he explained briefly what *was* in the Syllabus. How well he knew that damned Syllabus !

Yet he strayed again ! for the last ten minutes of the period turning over the pages

of an Anthology, of which part was set along with the Shakespeare and Milton. 'How sweet I roamed from field to field ! And tasted all the summer's pride !'

He must not let thought go off into reverie so ! That way madness lies !

Yet he did let thought go ; and the class, beginning to question the old majestic legend of this Alden Saheb, of whom preceding generations had told such paraphrasing exploits, saw that his mind was in a dream.

' Ah, sunflower ! weary of time ! ' Did ever the brain of man, in any language, frame its thoughts and exquisite acceptance of tiredness and sun-sodden, restful, soft, luxuriating imaginings in words of such ineffable glory and beauty ? ' Ah, *sunflower ! weary—of time !* ' Weary—yet accepting the ticking of the clock and of the steady-beating pulse within us, the slow ageing of body and spirit, the dying-down of youth and the waning of the body's strength, the sun's firm process through heaven, and night's passage upwards to assume his place ! Journeying effortlessly, ever onward, to that hour and paradisaal region :

Where the youth—pined away with desire—
And the pale virgin—shrouded in snow—
Arise from their graves, and aspire
Where my Sunflower wishes to go !

‘ Sir ? ’

‘ Yes. Sorry ! I was forgetting ! ’

‘ What is the meaning of poem on page forty-three ? Has poet no hidden innuendo ? ’

‘ Beyond doubt, symbolical,’ said another voice easily.

He turned to poem on page forty-three :
Webster’s dirge for the Duchess of Malfi. He
began to read it aloud :

Call for the robin redbreast and the wren,
Since o’er shady groves they hover
And with leaves and flowers do cover
The friendless bodies of unburied men !
Call unto his funeral dole
The ant, the fieldmouse, and the mole,
To rear him hillocks. . . .

He asked a question. ‘ Why does the poet call for the robin redbreast and the wren ? ’
He wondered if they had heard the story of the babes in the wood. It was a folklore simplicity that would fit in well with Indian fields and forests.

As he asked the question his eyes settled on

a large beefy child in the early twenties, who interpreted it as a demand personal to himself. He had to answer this idiotic query as to why poet called for robin redbreast and wren ! However, that was an easy one ! He answered without hesitation—in firm confident tones :

‘ Because that is habit of robin-bird.’

Alden closed the book and dismissed them smilingly.

Very likely he did not understand about poet’s symbolical meaning. Alden Saheb was growing old.

3

His day’s work had begun with Milton. He found it was to end with this author.

He had taken over charge of a hostel, and that night, after dinner with the McCormicks, went off to it early. His room had before it a tiny strip of veranda, and between this and the veranda in front of the students’ rooms was a frail-timbered door.

Night was too gruesome for sleep. He moved his bed to his veranda, in hopes of a breath from outside, and became aware of

two students also unable to sleep and therefore preparing each other by question and answer. Milton was the theme of research.

‘What were Meelton’s *re-lations* with his *first-wife*?’

‘They were on-*happy*.’

That came pat and trippingly off the brain and tongue ; it was all in the book.

There was a long, long pause. Then :

‘What does that mean?’

Alden was startled. In all his years of teaching for Calcutta University he had never before (it seemed to him) known a wanton straying off the Syllabus, a deliberate incursion into enquiry that could bring no reward in marks.

Another long pause. Then, hesitatingly, in tones of question, ‘He weeped her?’

Weeped? Not the causative of ‘weep’ (though no doubt it came to the same thing), but *whipped*. Yes, whipped. He whipped her. Milton whipped poor little Mary Powell.

Silence again, while both enquirers pondered this line of investigation. Then—with a little more confidence, but still some doubt—‘*I think so too.*’

One more long, long pause.

Then :

‘ Something of that sort.’ A dismissal of the problem.

So that was that.

And everything had followed in course of natural law. The annotator had started it, writing his facile introduction and remarking by the way (in the vague general manner of his tribe), ‘ Milton’s relations with his first wife were unhappy.’ Soundly orthodox students (Alden knew pretty accurately, by three decades of experience in intonation and variations of speech, where these two lived) were set to learn the statement by heart, and did so. There were no subtleties in the sex-life as known to them. Either a woman had her man’s rice ready in time, and tastefully ready, or she had not. Either he beat her or else he did not beat her, but was a kind husband. Turning on the alien annotator’s casual statement the lantern of their own interpretation—it was marvellous that they were interested enough even to pause to ask what it meant—they had decided that Milton was a wife-beater. And of course he may have been.

CHAPTER VII

NEXT day he learnt that he was expected to play cricket against the Town. He pleaded senility. The sturdiest of even county pros retires at last—at thirty, thirty-five, forty ; or, if he is a Philip Mead or a Woolley, a few years later. He himself was in the fifties.

The plea was rejected. The College Captain observed, ‘ Sir, everyone knows there is only one best player. Did you not make century against Bengal Nagpur Railway ? ’

Yes, he had done that. In 1912. Well, what he had done in 1912 he could do in 1936 also. In the opinion of the East, which sees us only in our arrogant prime and years of growth to prime, the Englishman is unageing.

So he played.

But where was the ‘ Sugarcane Master,’ as the Bengali in charge of the local experimental farm was called in those pre-War days when this match of Town versus College

was a battle of giants, Sugarcane Master against Alden Saheb? The other twenty players were lookers-on, privileged to be on the debating ground, and occasional accomplices of the two principals! Twice yearly the mighty struggle was waged, with varying result.

And sometimes Findlay would come in from his jungly fastnesses, co-opted a member of the College Staff. Not against the Town though! *That* disturbance of the scales public opinion would not tolerate! But if the College played an eleven from Calcutta, then for the former both Findlay and Sugarcane Master turned out, no one in Vishnugram being so unpatriotic as to question the qualifications of either.

The Town took first innings, and their opening batsman was the Armed Inspector. An interesting man; and Alden, called by the common voice as well as the Captain's to begin the attack, found him so.

The British in India who hold the innumerable minor jobs which no publicist ever bothers to notice, no novelist ever mentions—men on grass farms or serving as

armed inspectors or doing something for lesser princes,—are not like the civilians or prosperous business men whom everyone thinks of when visualising the ruling race. They have their own ways and thoughts and speech, and their own names.

And these names are often very unusual names. Alden was aware of this. But was nevertheless inclined to doubt the evidence of his ears when the Inspector alleged that his name was Chump.

Alden looked at him uncertainly. Crump, perhaps ? Or Trump ?

The Inspector was quite clear on the point. ‘Chump,’ he repeated, unmistakably and firmly. ‘Sergeant Chump.’

The umpire, acting under instructions from Alden, asked Sergeant Chump if he wanted ‘Centre.’ The Sergeant looked doubtful ; obviously, the question had not previously been put to him. Trained to obedience, he was willing to do whatever he was told. One of the fielders therefore held his bat for him, and moved it as the umpire’s finger directed. Sergeant Chump, standing aside dispassionately, watched the proceed-

ings. Some kind of obscure ritual, possibly Hindu. These things were interesting to see, though one could not hope to understand them.

Alden asked if he wanted a trial ball. Sergeant Chump, prepared to assent to any proposal, seemed on the whole to think he did. So the bowler tossed up a dolly. The batsman did not think he was called on to do anything about it. The dolly broke his wicket, which was made up again.

Alden rated himself low as a bowler. He had one ball only, a slow off-break delivered from his height. A good ball if rightly pitched, turning in a few inches and taking the outside stump : a rank bad ball if short, as it too often was. It had been known to get rid of an awkward partnership, but it did not often get a second wicket. He bowled it now, and hoped for the best. Sergeant Chump watched it coming, and made no effort to stir his bat. His wicket was again broken.

Sergeant Chump remained where he was. It was explained to him, after another batsman had arrived at the crease, that his innings was finished and that this gentleman

would take his place. The umpire, appealed to, confirmed this interpretation. Sergeant Chump departed, looking very puzzled, and as though suspecting foul play. Alden at the end of the over modestly insisted on being taken off as a bowler. He had done enough to justify his ancient fame, which he knew rested on pretty sandy foundations if it rested on his bowling.

When it came to the turn of the College to bat, Sergeant Chump, deferentially asked where he fielded, did not at first reply. This question also was one that appeared to startle him. When it was pressed he answered, 'Where you wish.' It was then his skipper's turn to look startled, as he searched about to find a spot where the Sergeant would be fairly innocuous. As anyone who has had to hide a rabbit inconspicuously away knows, such spots are hard to hit on. It proved so now, and the problem became a movable one. Sergeant Chump changed his place frequently ; but, no matter where he went, catches followed him, to be duly deposited on the earth. As Alden wrote to his wife afterwards, 'It was a different hole, but always

the same red-cheeked bunny looking out from it.'

Bunny began at mid-on. Alden received a long hop on the middle stump, and from want of practice clouted it, savagely indeed, but not along the carpet. He caught Sergeant Chump on the thigh. After the agony had somewhat abated (as the infant Macaulay observed on a famous occasion), Sergeant Chump limped off to square-leg, where Alden hit him severely on the right knee. This double casualty—not the hitting a fielder, but twice giving a chance off rotten bowling—demoralised Alden, who trod on his own wicket and retired, muttering to himself :

I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
I would have made them skip : I am old now . . .
Mine eyes are not of the best.

At the ringside he found a still-writhing Sergeant, convinced that there was a deliberate down on him. Under the reproachful gaze of Mrs. Chump, a large, languishing-saucer-eyed, mahogany-hued lady, and a number of junior Chumps, Alden rubbed in arnica, and offered such consolation as was permissible from the assaulter to the assaultee. After a

longish wait, the Sergeant was persuaded to return to the front, where he missed four more catches.

The Town, thanks to this assistance, when they went in again were fifty-odd runs behind. Alden refused to bowl, remembering Mrs. Chump's sad visage ; and this time the Sergeant's first ball mysteriously (for he made no effort to stir his bat) glanced off over slip's head. Whereupon, in the hubbub that ensued, Alden was again reminded of *King Lear* :

Albany. Run ! run ! O RUN !

Edgar. To whom, my lord ?

Exhorted simultaneously by so many voices to 'Run ! Run ! RUN !' the Sergeant looked all round him. Saw (and heard) Alden shouting to someone to be slippy and send the ball in expeditiously. Remembered the hurts he had twice received. Realised his peril, and that friendly well-wishers were urging him to escape while there was yet time. He threw down his bat therefore, and fled towards the square-leg umpire, the Rev. John McCormick, whom he knew, and knew moreover to be a white man in every sense of the term, one

who would protect his own blood. He accepted the subsequent information that he was 'Out,' whatever that meant, and allowed himself to be led away to safety.

That evening Alden called at the Sergeant's bungalow and found his victim swathed in enormous wraps and drinking rum and hot tea. Mrs. Chump, overcoming awe, let him know what she thought of his conduct. 'A prettee thing this is, to try to kill my Marmee !' (It transpired that the Sergeant's name was Marmaduke.) 'And when it was the verree first time that he had played your cricket game !'

Alden expressed sorrow, and stayed a while. The brown sad faces of the lesser Chumps, several of both kinds and neatly spaced as to ages, made a complete circle of disapproving eyes round him. A couple of chained civet cats on the veranda also showed dislike, and chattered hard when he came near them.

CHAPTER VIII

I

IF you have ever been Governor of a Province or Head of any sort of educational institution, the one thing you cannot do is to own up that you have forgotten a face. Temporise, play for time till you get hold of a clue. If necessary, lie hard and fiercely. But do not let your office down.

From the City came old students, hearing that their teacher was back. Half-familiar faces confronted Alden's eyes of questioning.

‘ Sir, you do not remember me ? ’

He remembered himself returning to his own public school, sure that the Head would kindle at sight of him again. It was only seven years since he had made his farewell call before sailing to India. Yet the Head walked beside him, saying with slow unsuccessful cunning, ‘ Let me see ? The face is—oh, so familiar ! But I seem somehow to forget the name ! ’

So Alden would now answer, 'Not remember you? Nonsense! Why, of course you are—you are——'

'Sir' (after a long unhelpful pause—shades of sorrow and disappointment beginning to overcloud the face), 'I am Ramchandra, your old pupil.'

Yes, but *which* Ramchandra? College and collegiate school together held some eight hundred pupils, and a huge percentage of these were Ramchandras.

After another pause, 'Sir, I am Ramchandra Chatterjee.'

Since between twenty and thirty per cent of the Ramchandras were also Chatterjees, this too was unenlightening. Ramchandra Chatterjee when and how, and in what circumstances?

At last, with deep eyes of grief in the reproachful face, 'I was in your B.A. class of 1912. You used to call me Mighty Bhim, because I did morning exercises with dumbbells.'

Of course. *Mohabir Bhim, jahar dosh hazar hathir bol chhilo*: Bhim the Mighty Hero, of whom the strength of ten thousand elephants was.

2

Lastly, by his own special, massive, far-spreading banyan—the one in whose moon-speckled shadow he had come face to face with that leopard, twenty, no, nearly thirty years ago—he came upon Christacharan (‘The Feet of Christ’). Christacharan, the smallpox-pitted Sonthal, with a skin like polished ebony, was his own first laboratory bottle-washer and general runner of College errands.

He was now holding two tiny parakeets. (Pointing upwards to the great banyan) ‘I found them there. In a hole.’

He might have remembered that his former Chief disapproved of this seizure of wild things for life imprisonment inside wires. Since he had evidently forgotten, Alden for the present merely made courteous enquiry of Christacharan’s plans for their future.

‘My mother will be very kind to them,’ explained Christacharan. ‘She has given them their names.’

Hearing herself mentioned, his mother appeared from behind a clump of guavas, a

wizened, squat old gnome. She had decades earlier reduced dematerialisation and re-appearance to a fine art. Alden remembered his disconcerting arrival on a cycle, at an hour when they might have thought themselves assured of loneliness, to find Christacharan in the branches of these same guavas, while his mother, that skilful thief, was receiving spoil in a basket. On that occasion her art had been surprised. But then, Alden in his vigorous youth had had his own flashing manner of coming and going. Not for nothing had he been nicknamed ' *Bhut* ' (' Ghost ').

' The Mother of Christacharan ' (she had no other name—at least, none that anyone had ever been heard to use—this was her distinction, that she had brought into the world this interesting son, and the fact was commemorated upon every need to refer to her) corroborated her son's testimony. ' This one is called *Jesu Pakhi Mone Roi* ! And that one *Jesu Pakhi Hite Roi* ! '

' Jesus Remains in the Bird's Mind.' And ' Jesus Does the Bird Good.' Five sparrows were sold for one farthing, yet not one of them could fall to the ground without the

World's Master knowing and caring ! Alden, looking at the soft, helpless fledglings, pleading and protesting vociferously, paraphrased the prayers aloud. ' God Help the Poor Birds ! '

' Yes,' agreed the Mother of Christacharan, not understanding English in the least, but quite sure that whatever sahebs said was right, or at any rate to be concurred in. Both nodded their heads, with a circular twist from right to left.

Commending Christacharan and the Mother of Christacharan for their piety and its beautiful touching expression, Alden commanded them to bring the nestlings back to him as soon as they could fly. He would then, he told them, purchase them at the correct market rates. An unnecessary magnanimity, seeing that they had been pinched from the trees of what he still regarded (and must always regard) as his own College. However, he must compound this felony, to keep its kind within limits.

3

He found that first impressions of his colleague were sound. McCormick was a good

fellow, a thoroughly good fellow, but fussy about trifles. He fumed over this and that triviality of trivialities—wondered if Wordsworth were being properly taught (as if it mattered how Wordsworth were taught !) and if the Bengali Pundit were using his periods to instil ‘ sedition ’ instead of vernacular literature. (Of course he was so using them. Would not you do it, if you were a Bengali Pundit ?) He was exercised over a complaint brought against Christacharan, that he had been beating his mother.

It was now that sturdy little Mrs. McCormick showed her excellent sense. ‘ She *ought* to be beaten. She’s a very silly and annoying old woman.’ Alden agreed, remembering her as a receiver of stolen guavas, and recalling also innumerable other deeds of turpitude, ‘ in the dark backward and abysm of time.’

Incident by incident, and item by item, his old life came flooding up and back. There were times when he could almost persuade himself that nothing had changed.

PART II

JOHN FINDLAY

CHAPTER I

I

IN October came the *Puja* ¹ holidays, and he could undertake the business that lay nearest to his heart.

Indianisation took a long while in coming to Christian missions, but when it came, came with a rush. Findlay, five years earlier, at his own request had sunk into subordination to an Indian minister at Kanthala. Then illness had come, and he had all but died. He had been ordered furlough, which he refused to take. Finally, since doctors insisted on a long change and rest, he had gone to a ragged bungalow on the Orissa marches, nearly a year previously.

So far as Alden could learn, during the last ten years he had rarely taken any part of his salary. 'I have need of nothing.' It appeared

¹ *Puja* means *worship*. These holidays are in honour of the National Goddess, in her forms as Durga and Kali.

to be true. He had need of nothing.

No railways went within many miles of Bargigarh, where he now had an address. Only an occasional motor-bus. The place was a thousand feet up from the Gangetic plain and had a reputation for healthiness ; Indians visited it when they wanted a holiday in some place where they could forget that Europeans existed.

Formerly had been a cantonment here, arising out of one of the minor (yet protracted) campaigns of John Company days. Up to twenty years ago, a few companies of native cavalry had been stationed at Bargigarh, and there was an extensive level that had been used for cold-weather manœuvres. Then Government, curtailing expense, had sold off buildings or let them drop to pieces, and had made brand-new establishments elsewhere.

On a long flat hill seven miles to the west of the Town was a fort, built in the sixteenth century by a Moslem general whose family made themselves, to all intents and purposes, independent. This fort, in their great invasion of Bengal in 1743, the Mahrattas had scaled and captured. They had achieved this

(tradition said) in the manner alleged to have been theirs in their native Deccan. They had seized a *ghorpad*, a giant lizard ; the squat strong reptile whose claws could catch and cling anywhere had been compelled to pull a soldier up the wall by night. From the battlements' top the soldier had lowered a rope, by which his comrades one by one had silently followed.

The Mahratta chief had established himself here in place of the ejected Moslem chief, and his family emblazoned a *ghorpad* on their banners. The last act of their story (as of so much else) had been the Mutiny in 1857. They had been dispossessed on suspicion of complicity, and their descendants, in poverty and obscurity, still lived on at Bargigarh, receiving from the people a great observance.

There was no longer any dak bungalow, but Alden learnt that there was an 'hotel,' known as the 'Superb.' From long experience he knew that he could manage anywhere, and he was assured that the Superb was endurable.

2

The motor-bus is the most important new factor in post-War India. The railways are so slow—so damnably slow (unless you are speeding from one major capital to another)—so dusty—so—so—inconvenient ; and the stations are often so far from the cities they are alleged to serve ! You get down—and find that anything up to a twelve-mile journey by road awaits you. The motor-bus is quicker, cheaper, and provides a jolly communal method of travel, not unlike that of *The Canterbury Tales*.

It is wrong and unusual for a European to use a motor-bus. But Alden was a missionary, so this dereliction from race and position was explained. He enjoyed the trip greatly, as they bowled along avenue-shaded roads. He was grateful, not for the first time, to Ahalya Bai, the noble Mahratta lady who marked the path of her return from pilgrimage to Puri, a hundred and fifty years ago, by this line of trees across northern India.

At a midway village the bus halted and the passengers refreshed themselves with amaz-

ingly hot tea, amazingly brilliantly coloured drinks, and sticks of sugarcane and bunches of bananas and platters of sweets dripping molasses. Here, too, civilisation had pushed its all-conquering march. Gramophones ground out songs of an ear-piercing shrillness; on the walls were pictures of Indian cuties disporting themselves. Alden again wondered by what right our diehards block India's path to independence ; she will soon be as fit for self-government as the democratic Western peoples.

Young men and women threaded their way in and out of the regaling passengers. From the want of enthusiasm with which their attentions were submitted to, he guessed that they were not merely doing propaganda for Congress, but collecting hard cash. They gave Alden a wide berth. Others, however, tried to tap his generosity ; they were busy over Cow Protection. The Viceroy had shown great enthusiasm for cows, thereby endearing the not-so-Satanic-as-was-formerly believed Government to a restive (but responsive) people. They tried to sell the Englishman pamphlets, these earnest young men

with bigoted narrow faces.

He glanced through the pamphlets, and was reminded (ought any one of us to forget it, for any moment of this fleeting existence?) of how firm a foundation of sheer lunacy underlies civilisation. God in his infinite wisdom has provided that every land should run daft at the mention of some special word. Knowing that we must have something to worship (and that beauty and goodness do not move us to worship), he has seen to it that it shall be something so utterly silly that each nation shall be a source of amused pleasure and sense of superiority to other nations.

He has tied India to Cow Worship.

Alden learnt that a great religious and political leader urged Cow Protection on the grounds that 'Milk is the only food that is produced by LOVE' (India does not regard eggs as legitimate food). A mighty argument when the drab, hustled generations move through an air that hums with songs about 'Love,' so often (and so very often)—a noise soaring high above the sounds of

Sorrow barricadoed evermore
Within the walls of cities.

Distinguished Europeans and Americans, the proffered pamphlets alleged, had written ecstatic testimonials to the unlovely brutes whose chief need was rigorous thinning-out !

No, he did not want these pamphlets.

‘ What ! you are not keen on Cow ! ’

‘ Afraid not.’

‘ You do not think Cow important ! You do not realise that future of India depends on Cow ! ’

‘ Yes. I more or less realise that.’

‘ Then why will you not support Viceroy’s movement to improve Cow ? ’

‘ The best way of improving your cows would be to destroy about a hundred and fifty millions of them.’ He explained how valueless were the bones that wandered on rickety sticks.

His petitioner was pertinacious. ‘ But if they were feeded and breeded, would not that improve Cow ? See what these distinguished gentlemen have said about Cow ! ’

‘ Yes, that’s the trouble. They talk such appalling rot about it.’

‘ *Who* has talked appalling rot about Cow ? ’

Alden indicated a name on the pamphlets.

‘ But if he talked rot about Cow, how could he be supporter of our movement ? In that case, he would care nothing about Cow ! ’

He saw how it was. The enthusiast, whatever his race or theme, in the last argument is impregnable ; he has locked himself into some granite *non sequitur*. Or, to change the metaphor, he has found two statements, both deliriously meaningless. If you batter him from one he merely takes refuge in the other ; and so back again when battered out of that.

So Alden gave the enthusiast a rupee, and walked about while his fellow-passengers fed. Presently they all went on, brighter and friendlier than ever. The screeching gramophone songstresses gave place to the screeching swift-flying parakeets in the banyans of Ahalya Bai’s avenue.

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER advantage of the motor-bus is its accommodating spirit. The Superb Hotel lay half a mile off the proper route. But the driver, hearing that the saheb was going there, drove to it before entering the city, no one objecting. Time matters little in India, and people have always plenty of courtesy, especially when you have got away from the great capitals.

Outside the hotel was a board. Two boards, in fact. One held its name of all work, as it were ; the artist had been uncertain of his spelling, and had put up 'Souperb Hotel,' later—no doubt when some pedant had come along—drawing a red line through the *o*. The line was hesitant and undulating, as though it were still felt that soup should somehow be indicated as belonging to the premises and obtainable there. A second board offered an alternative

name : Pilgrims' Paradise.

Alden was a pilgrim. He deposited his simple kit, and entered Paradise.

A large dark person came out of the bungalow's central cavern, looking like an outsize in gorillas. His arms were longer than even Alden's, and he held them droopingly below his knees, as though they might at any moment come in as auxiliaries to his walking, which stooped forward and earthward. Yes, an outsize in gorillas, that had stolen a pair of navy's corduroys.

'I am Proprietor,' he observed. 'Much happy to see European Gentleman. I will now show Master Principal Guestroom.' His name, he added, was Alexander MacNab.

'So,' Alden wrote home, 'I settled down in this cesspit. And the Pirate Chief showed me to Principal Guestroom.'

Over the central room, where the inmates dined, were rafters, but nothing in the way of continuous roof. Alden did not mind this ; during meals he could wear his sun-helmet. An unusual practice for men at their meals. But then, this was an unusual hotel. It was Pilgrims' Paradise.

He glanced upward more dubiously, however, when he found that Principal Guest-room also had only a roof's skeleton. The rains' drippings and the sun's hostile smittings would find an unimpeded way. 'There is no roof,' he pointed out.

Mr. MacNab agreed. There was no roof; and his face lit up with pride. 'That is a good arrangement,' he remarked.

'A good arrangement?'

'Yes. Officers used to complain much. Because of the RATS! Too many RATS! Officers wished fewer RATS. So I took roof off.'

'Oh! So you took roof off! Because of the RATS?'

'Yes. Because officers complained much. Of too many RATS!'

This was satisfactory, so far as it went. But still not entirely clear.

So Alden asked, 'How did you manage to get rid of the rats? After you had stripped the roof?'

Over Mr. MacNab's face swept a happy smile. He went out, and returned with a long bamboo pole and a tall speckled dog with curling golden tail. 'With pole and dog,' he

explained, resting the pole's top against the edge of the upper wall.

Alden understood. Some confederate up above had chivvied the rats, bewildered by loss of their rafters ; and the rats had used the bamboo, perfidiously (though, they imagined, providentially) leant as a ladder of escape. The dog had snapped them up like biscuits, as they came to ground.

Everything looked leprous, the curtains and scanty linen most of all. Alden decided to spend most of his time out of doors. That, he thought, would prove ' a good arrangement.'

The Proprietor, reading his guest's face, sensed that his pleasure was barely lukewarm; the chill was not yet off it. He disappeared (his appearances and disappearances, Alden was to find, were swift and noiseless), and returned bearing a Visitors' Book. Opening it, he said rebukingly, ' Gentleman please read in book ! And *see what Officers said.*'

Officers ? But of course. Pilgrims' Paradise was a caravanserai where such very minor Government demi- and semi-officials as still toured these parts could stay. It was cheap ; and (as Alden presently discovered) the

cooking was excellent. He himself (as Mr. MacNab, after a long, long pause while he scanned his face, had told him) was to pay five rupees a day ; but he was under no misunderstanding as to the rates for ordinary travellers. And for such travellers, who were not finicking, pernickety Englishmen, but sought only richly gheeified and spiced curries, Pilgrims' Paradise was a good arrangement. A man able to put himself where he could see with others' eyes, Alden saw this.

Mr. MacNab was still holding out his Visitors' Book. '*Read !*' he urged.

Alden read therefore. 'Pilgrim's Paradise is rightly named, indeed if one may quote poet in different connection it may be said phantom of delight.' 'Here we find all the comforts one could wish for in own home.' 'How unfortunate that propreitor has not bar ! With bar this would be really and truly home from home.' 'This is indeed paradise for those who have left kith and kin.'

'That is how Officers *said*,' observed Mr. MacNab.

'Yes, I see they have.'

Alden stood there in a muse ; and began to wonder about a bath. The Pirate Chief, who had great powers of telepathy, suddenly asked if gentleman would like TUB, with immense aplomb on TUB. ' I took it from bathroom because last gentleman, who was very huge gentleman, did not like TUB.' Alden thought he would like TUB, and TUB was procured accordingly. The Pirate Chief drew attention to the fact that in this bathroom was a tap as well as jugs of water. ' You turn on tap to get more water in TUB.' Robin out of sheer idleness did as advised, and tap shot upwards a superb geyser which hit the roof and brought down a wad of muddy plaster. He dived forward to turn off tap, and the beastly thing changed its direction and slapped him full in the face. He turned the tap every way that seemed possible, and still the geyser functioned, merely switching to his chest or thighs, until by luck he struck the one angle which closed it. The Pirate Chief, standing at a distance, expressed regret and surprise. ' I put in tap to suit Officers. Officers all said, tap would be good, for tap is great convenience. With tap you get plenty

of water, and no need for Staff to bring water. It is a good arrangement.'

There seemed nothing more to say, and Mr. MacNab excused himself, to prepare gentleman's breakfast. 'My Staff very busy this morning. So must give help.'

Alden bathed therefore, and afterwards waited on a veranda till dinner was ready.

CHAPTER III

I

THE speckled dog joined him, to his annoyance insistently trying to nuzzle and be nuzzled, and to put up his feet on Alden's lap, with that utter and most pathetic inability of dogs to believe that you are not more interested in them than in anything else.

Alden had too many things to worry about, to have attention to spare for even this king among bazaar-bred mongrels. His attention was caught, nevertheless, when the dog suddenly proposed to use his legs as if he were a tree or a post.

This astonished him almost as much as anything ever astonished him. His mind was elsewhere. But he saw the idea just in time ; and erupted like a volcano from his chair. The dog sheered off with celerity, and from a distance eyed him reproachfully ; then shambled indoors, and made a tour of the

chairs and the table's four supports.

During this performance Mr. MacNab was laying breakfast on the same table. He now materialised on the veranda, and announced that all was ready. He had dressed specially up in Alden's honour, and was wearing a jumper that had been blue, and over it a tattered blazer which Alden recognised as that of his own old College (no, not Balliol). Evidently Alden was not the first distinguished visitor from the West ! Following his gaze, Mr. MacNab's eyes filled with a proud light. ' That very remarkable dog,' he said. ' No other man here has dog like mine.'

' I'm sure of that,' said Alden, with malignant gaze fixed still on the subject of these encomiums.

' Gentleman see bed in Principal Guest-room ? '

Alden *had* seen it, and could see it now—looming through the curtainless opening ! lying in unearthly stillness ! hushed in grim repose, expecting its evening prey. ' What about the bed ? ' he asked morosely.

' Last winter cobra came in that room. Another gentleman on that bed, and cobra

wish to attack gentleman. It climb up leg of bed. And this dog,' he called it to him and patted it approvingly, 'rush at cobra and bite it. And cobra run into hole, and leave part of tail outside. And then *I* come, and '—he bared a superbly muscular arm, pulling up his jumper and clenching his fist to illustrate—'I pull snake out, like this—slowly—and my sister, she hit snake over head as it come out of hole, and snake die. Very good dog,' he concluded.

'And very good sister,' commented Alden cordially.

He had caught glimpses of her behind a curtain that was drawn half-way across the dining-room; a grey-haired, tired, humble-looking Eurasian old woman. He had already guessed that she was the whole of 'my Staff,' to which the Proprietor referred so proudly.

The days had long passed when he would have thought there was anything funny in either their squalor or their courage. These two were working hard and patiently to earn a living in the only way that the world's arrangements (which, he said to himself, 'are *not* "good arrangements"') had left open to

them. The living was a third-rate one ; but the courage and patience were not third-rate. At the Last Day, when the final books are made up, he wanted to stand at the Almighty's shoulder, to make sure that none of our earthly stupidity slips into the reckonings. Providence has had so much on its hands—such mighty territorial and national businesses, and such great persons and personages—that it probably will need some witness humbler, yet observant and strongly opinionated, and prepared to fight for his unorthodoxies, in order to get things right at last. Alden, who had drifted so long about and over India, shedding so many selves in this one incarnation, knew his limitations and sins, but believed that he was worth consulting.

MacNab, despite his name, seemed to him probably straight Goanese. Alden had a respect for the race. In the arrogance of youth, ignorant and echoing in his confidently delivered judgments, he had laughed at these outcasts of East and West—serfs on our steamers, players at Hindu weddings, literally cooks and bottlewashers everywhere.

Now he had learnt that, whenever he found himself off the beaten track in India, if suddenly any efficiency of service showed itself, it was because this despised race was in charge.

He thought of the cobra in the bedroom yarn, and did not dismiss it as necessarily a yarn only. They were quite capable—the man of tugging out the reptile, the grey-haired, tired-looking old woman of smashing its head.

He drew a black thick cloth over his imagination, and sat down to dinner. Towards the end of the meal one other guest appeared, an Indian doctor.

2

In the room's centre was a screen. He guessed that on the other side of it the Staff were listening. He did not grudge them this simple pleasure. It must have been a great while since a guest as distinguished as himself had visited Pilgrims' Paradise. His surmise was confirmed ; at interesting points in the conversation Mr. MacNab materialised suddenly, and contributed to it.

He also sometimes brought in plates ; and sometimes these struck him as perhaps not clean enough for this guest. He would then glance at them, decide that they could do with a burnishing, and would wipe them on his breeches' seat.

Alden asked why he did this.

The question struck the questioned as a foolish one. ' Why, to make plate clean ! Do you not wish clean plate ? '

' But have you no dusters ? '

' All in cookhouse. That is good arrangement. To have dusters where needed.' Mr. MacNab dismissed the subject.

In this fashion, with the Proprietor whisking out from ambush whenever the conversation took an interesting turn, dinner passed. They heard much of the prowess of his animal assistants, and Robin visualised the whole establishment as one loyal fortress knit to repel invaders.

A small poisonous snake had had the unwisdom to visit the poultry. ' And my cock seized him, and the hens were rushing after him, and we tried to get snake from cock, but we could not, and he swallowed snake, and

we thought cock will die ! But no harm ! Snakes do not come now ! They dare not ! My hens and my cock, they kill them all ! ’

Watching under the lifted curtain before his room a bloated bullfrog waddling, and occasionally hopping, over his bedroom floor, Robin suggested that in its wake a cobra might come. ‘ Oh no, sir ! He is verree dirtee frog ! *Veree* dirtee ! In fact, he is *loathsome* fellow ! Cobra will not eat him ! It is green frogs that cobra hunts. They are so—sweet for him ! ’

3

Robin managed some sleep that night, troubled (but not to the point of getting up) by noises in the dining-room (where he guessed after a while that Proprietor and Staff slept) and by loud splashes and wallowings in his bathroom which next morning proved to have been due to the trapped bullfrog. At breakfast next day, he asked about the surrounding country into which he was going. Was not Mr. MacNab afraid for his poultry (even if his cock could deal with

snakes), with all this jungle so near? Were there no jackals?

‘*Plenty* jackals! But no come close to hotel. Too much afraid’ (again that look of pride) ‘of my fine dog.’

‘What about leopards?’

‘No leopards. Too many shooters.’

Then he asked the way to Sonachura, ‘the Golden Crest.’

MacNab understood at once. ‘You wish to see Findlay Saheb?’

‘Yes.’

‘You know Findlay Saheb?’

‘Yes.’

‘There is no Christian gentleman like Findlay Saheb,’ said MacNab simply. ‘When my sister’s child die—when I was in prison—he come over late at night, in the monsoon, with wind—oh, so terrible! that night when many trees blown down—when everywhere thunder and lightning and everyone else afraid—and bring my sister money for his funeral. Because he know no money then. I being in prison.’

So the Proprietor had been in prison. This was interesting.

The Proprietor saw that it was, and went into some detail. 'I once not poor man, as you see me now. But Government official. Then they give me twenty years prison. It was in 1914, when many people think British Raj over, and so my enemies—wishing to see British Raj go!—bring charges against me. So judge give me twenty years. Twenty years!'

'What for?' asked Alden dispassionately. 'Embezzlement?'

'Oh no!' said Mr. MacNab, shocked. 'Nothing of the sort! Merely misappropriation.'

'Of trustee funds. Which came into office, you see,' explained the doctor.

Alden did see; and understood, without completely sharing, the general sympathy with the Pirate Chief. If the funds were trustee ones, they belonged to minors. And what need of large sums have mere children? It is those of mature years who have heavy expenses.

'Misappropriation? Ah, yes. Of course.'

'Yes. Of trustee funds. As doctor has well said. Which came into office. It was in 1914, when all people think your Government is

going. So my clerks, they made false evidence against me. They think your Government finished, so they can attack poor Alexander MacNab ! But God show them their mistake.'

' Naturally,' Alden agreed cordially. ' One expects Him to do that. In due time, of course. But what *was* the mistake, and how did God point it out ? '

' He has punished all those who made evidence against me—in my own sight ! The one who made chief evidence, his little girl was drowned before his own eyes, and he himself became a leprosy. And all the others, some of them died, some of them became a suicide. God has punished them all ! for what they did to Alexander MacNab ! '

After a pause, to let his points sink home, the Pirate Chief continued his saga. ' The English Judge came to home—from sentencing me. And there were two little sheep that his children used to play with—two little girls. And they were bleating. And he took a gun and he shot them. Before wife's own eyes.'

The inference, Alden supposed, was that

the Judge was in a bad temper—conscience telling him he had just done wrong. ‘I think,’ he said to himself, ‘it was the little sheep that were shot, not the little girls.’ Yes, it would undoubtedly be the sheep.

‘The Judge he disliked me. Or rather, his wife disliked me. That was why I was sentenced. The Judge said he would make an example of me. Even though I was innocent, I must have known what was being done.’

‘And it was then that Mr. Findlay came? While you were in prison?’

‘Oh, not then! I do my time. Not here! In Naini Jail. And there Jail Governor love me very much, and make me chief warder of European section. So my time too was shortened, and then I came here—not Government servant any longer! You understand?’

‘I understand.’

‘My mother and father died while I in jail. So I come here, with sister and her child, to start hotel.’

‘I see.’

‘When people very poor, they must start hotel.’

‘ I suppose so.’

‘ At that time there still British officers here, and my sister and I supply their all milk. At that time I keep many buffaloes, which I milk with own hand. But then Government take cantonment away, and we very poor again. And my enemies, they make false accusation to the magistrate of this district, and so three months ago they again arrest and take me back to the jail. But God helped me much, and they could find no evidence. No evidence. But ’ (and the dark face worked with wretchedness remembered) ‘ my sister’s little boy he die, while I away. I never forget Findlay Saheb’s kindness. We say—all our people say—Findlay Saheb not missionary but good man. He is saint of Mother of God, and my sister she say so—*always*.’ Tears streamed down the old black face.

Alden pressed his hand pityingly as he rose from the table.

CHAPTER IV

I

HE gave instructions for his kit to be kept until he returned. He stuffed a mosquito-net and oddments into a rucksack, and took the path indicated across the forest.

This broken scrubbed upland (he went pausingly, to drink in its loveliness) had known a busier life once, in days not so distant. Fifes had shrilled, tom-toms throbbed, elephants swayed in gaudy procession where now the cobbles were creeper-tangled. All that life had been. All that life had thought itself existent. All that life had vanished.

In our own northern islands, and throughout the lands to their east and southward was once an Empire which poets hymned as eternal, unlike the fleeting systems that had studded the years and countries sporadically before it arose. Yet Rome, too, had proved itself illusion ; it was a tale in our histories.

And who, reading history, sees it as anything but quiet words printed ? You read that this man died by an agony publicly and pitilessly prolonged : and that other had a mistress for whom he flung away dominion. Such and such a poet wrote his *Aeneid* or *Faerie Queene*. ‘ Spain ’ did this and ‘ England ’ that. And names that are now not even puppets dancing to the author’s string—they are words only—Elizabeth, Cromwell, Richelieu, Cicero, Pericles,—make a momentary place of half-halting. You visualise dimly shadowy shapes, and pass on. Sometimes a reported saying of one of them amuses you. But it means no more, thought Alden, than the forgotten paragraphs I read in the paper a week ago, and those are at least close to me in time. It means less, infinitely less, than this flower which I stop to handle and look at.

Our own British-Indian system, so carefully, tightly wrapped about with ‘ safeguards ’ and ‘ regulations,’ an equilibrium of check and countercheck, this also was dying out from the land. What was once passion and wrath and misery and pride was becoming a historian’s tale.

It was all platitude, and so well known and so little worth remembrance, even by oneself! Yet all so appalling when you felt it in this remote Central Indian silence and tangle! Enough to make the heart stand still at the futility and tenuity of this life which you symbolised and shared. Alden's Indian days were all but over, and he knew well that not even in history would there be a tiny plot left for his name.

As he wandered upward, the path winding now beneath the craggy walls of an old fortress, half natural, half deftly mortised into the rock-face, there came to him a queer noise of clanking and a dragging clatter. He followed it up, and saw a dully shining gleam pulled slowly through the scrub. Following it up still further, with swiftness yet caution, he reached a long chain and lifted one end of it. At the other end came to sharply an aged enormous lizard, a *ghorpad*, one of those which legend affirmed had tugged Mahratta soldiers up defences scaled by night. But why this wretched beast was dragging after him this chain, alone in this dense jungle, Alden could not guess. Nor how he had

escaped, hampered so, the jaws of leopard or jackal.

The poor brute slipped into deep recesses of a rocky wall, and Alden, pulling at the chain, could not extract him. Since he was loth to hurt him he had to let him go. There was no way of freeing him, even if the prisoner would let himself be freed. It seemed an allegory.

2

He came to Sonachura at last. It had its name, Golden Crest, from a yellowish rock which lifted a nose free of the wilderness, and overlooked the entire valley.

And across the valley was a loftier crest—many times loftier—the culmination of a majestic upward sweep of forest. This was called Meghachura, or Cloud Crest. Not merely, or mainly, because the clouds rested there (when the Indian day had any clouds), but because a certain dim greyness of hue in the rock that floated at last out of the sweep of forest suggested a cloud at rest.

Between the two Crests, the Cloud and the Golden, ran through silvery wide-stretching

sands a river, the Phalgu. Its waters were in most places a matter of fingers only in depth, and they were pure and cold. It came mysteriously out of dense wilderness, and along its banks, except where an occasional field of sugarcane interposed, that wilderness shut it close like a scabbard. The trees draped with creepers were like emerald curtains hung along its bed. There was only dark quiet forest, broad sands, and, in the midst of the sands, a sunlight-checkered play of babbling water.

And his heart leapt up, and age and weariness fell from him.

There had once been years which had seemed as if they would go on for ever ; and their memory was steeped in wilderness such as this. 'It took me a devil of a time to become thirty,' he thought. 'Lashings of time and time seemed to pass and pass endlessly, and I was always still in the twenties. And then I became thirty ! and in the swiftness of a falling stone another quarter of a century has gone by ! And the stone is still falling, falling, faster than ever !'

The hillside was broken with sparkling

points. Mica had formerly been mined here after a fashion, with a bungalow, on a ledge overlooking the stream far below, for the saheb who oversaw the digging. But that had been forty—no, fifty—years ago. The bungalow had long been abandoned.

He made his way to it, not saunteringly, but with the swift long strides for which he was famous. Mayhew, former District Police Officer in Vishnugram, had served in Palestine during the War, and always maintained that Alden was ‘a disguised Aussie.’ ‘You won’t get another such stride, a regular kangaroo-sweep and lope across country, outside the Antipodes ! I don’t like to have him around, Mrs. Alden ! I always expect him to start chucking my piano and pictures through the window !’

He reached the house and, without the ceremony of shouting for a servant (he did not know if Findlay had one), entered. Most of the house was in irreparable ruin, but two rooms survived with sound roof and walls, and were being kept dry by fires in the winter. Both were empty.

Prowling in the backward arcas, he found

in an old cook-house an aged man who was servant and household generally.

The aged man was apparently only three-quarter-witted, and he was very deaf. The important thing was, he cooked for Findlay. This he could doubtless do ; the last thing an Indian loses is his ability to cook. He can still cook when dropping into eternity. He can still cook when power of speech has gone, and the pageant of night and day become like Shakespeare's gesticulating idiot, something whose mouthings and noises signify—nothing !

Alden learnt that Findlay Saheb was out, that he might remain out as long as it was ' God's will ' : that ' God knew ' when he would return : that God, in short, was in charge of him and his movements. Which was all pretty much what Alden knew already.

God may have taken thought for Alden also, and have taken into compassionate consideration the fact that he had toiled up these stiff mountain tangles. Looking out over the valley, he saw a form coming up from the river. He went down accordingly, with those swift long strides of his. He and John con-

fronted each other. They held out their hands simultaneously. Alden said :

‘ I come to tarry with thee three hours’ space.
Accept the gift ; behold me face to face ! ’

CHAPTER V

THE three hours had never been in his intention. He scrapped all notion of time as soon as they met.

He found an old mattress whose cotton stuffing rats had pillaged ; filled out with sal leaves, it would serve. He stuck into cracks in the floor bamboo poles for a mosquito net, and his arrangements were complete. As for food, he would walk down before sunset to the hamlet, three miles away, which supplied Findlay. He made some tea now.

They sat then in shadow of a tree, and were silent together. Afterwards, in slow pausing fashion, they exchanged the story of the years and filled in the colours and shadows omitted in correspondence. The story of Robin's life, and of John's since he had left Kanthala.

There is no return, no reincarnation. But for some there is a gradual withdrawal, and a

space of months, or it may be years, when two worlds lie open. John had found his own place, one independent of these ways in which our bodies walk. The eyes confronting Robin belonged to a spirit that used the flesh's frailty as veil and curtain ; its home was in the homeless, where are all spirits that have passed out of time for ever.

Findlay caught the distress in his friend's mind. ' You are not to fuss or worry, Rob. There's nothing wrong with me. And what is wrong,' he said, more quietly yet, ' is the thing that is most right of all. I was told that I had only these few months left, in which I must gather myself together to go. I had worked all my days, and at last I felt that I was meant to be alone with myself, having been at others' mercy all my life. There was nothing more that I could do. The message was quite clear.'

Robin understood.

' It is only that something in the way of physical strength is fading out. It came to me as I was lying awake looking at that mountain, with my bed on the veranda. Someone walked up to me, and we looked at sky and

hill together. And at going they said——'

Robin knew who 'they' were. John continued. 'They said I should have a sign when the end was actually come. So I got things ready. There wasn't much to get ready, only the habit of my mind, and that needed small adjustment.'

When you are young every ache and pain can seem a portent, and sharp illness like a sudden tug at life. When you are old you say nothing, but know. Not everything at once, but enough. There is the gradual dimming out of zest and vigour, and of colour and movement in the world outside, and you know that time begins to fall from you.

Or there may be clearer, quicker intimations. That man on whom you so looked down—that woman who was so unshowy and stupidly sweet and futile—how rightly and fitly you assessed them as negligible, until one day you learnt in what manner they had been living all through those days when you preened yourself as their superior !

And you yourself, so shallow and casual and complacent with yourself, when your own time comes may in your turn surprise

even your closest companions, so that they will say they never dreamt you had it in you.

Alden was 'not to fuss or worry' over what was coming. Yet for years this had been a cloud overshadowing all thought !

That the peace of God filled John's life, the eyes of the man whom he loved bore witness ; there was no hint of disquiet in their serenity. His friend had taken all living beings into his kindness, and during days and nights of loneliness had come to know the wild lives of forest and mountain, moving through them fearlessly and leaving no fear. The stories which Indians tell of their *rishis* they told of him also ; that he had been seen at dawn in a jungle clearing, with the deer beside him, and had slept through nights of tempest, in caves where bear or leopard had found refuge already. Seeking nothing, asking nothing, he maintained that he had all things. It was true.

If thou wouldst have high God thy soul assure
That she herself shall as herself endure . . .
One way I know ; forget, forswear, disdain
Thine own best hopes, thine utmost loss and gain,
Till when at last thou scarce rememberest now
If on the earth be such a man as thou,

Nor hast one thought of self-surrender—no,
 For self is none remaining to forgo— . . .
 When all base thoughts like frightened harpies flown
 In her own beauty leave the soul alone ;
 When Love—not rosy-flushed as he began,
 But Love still Love, the prisoned God in man—
 Shows his face glorious, shakes his banner free—

then, truly, eternity has found the spirit, and
 life lags superfluous !

That was ‘ the hero’s temper.’ For Alden, who had not forsaken the world—whose heart was restless, and so often a cause of unrest to others—the past could not die so completely, could not be swept aside. He remained haunted by memory of the terror and anguish which had once broken his friend. There had come, beyond all hope or possibility, a recovery into happiness that had taken possession for ever. Yet Alden felt, as he must always feel, that what had happened was something that ought not to have happened, and if God had been reasonably fair could not have happened.

He drove down the mind’s rebellion, and told himself, ‘ If John understands it, then there must be some sense I cannot guess at.’

After a while, John asked suddenly, 'Do you remember J. H. Moulton?'

'Of course I remember him. Who ever forgot him?'

'Do you remember how he came out here, at the Parsees' request, to lecture to them on their own religion, during the War?'

'Yes. I saw him, the day he sailed—as you remember, to be torpedoed in the Mediterranean. They drifted about in an open boat for three days, and Moulton died before they were rescued.'

'It's about that that I was thinking,' said John quietly. 'I met a man who was with him all that while. He told me that Moulton was busy unceasingly, and not for himself—about himself he seemed utterly detached and indifferent—but for the others, and most of all for some poor Indian lascars who were in the boat and miserable with cold and fear. And that, last of all, he died for no other reason than that he walked unresistingly out of life. His only son had just been killed; and his wife was dead, and all the reason for living had gone out. He had carried on as long as he was commanded. But when the

torpedoing came he knew that the show was finished. It seems to me,' he concluded, 'that there comes a time when you let the oars sleep, and the tide does the rest.'

CHAPTER VI

I

IN the evening arrived a coolie with a basket containing butter, chickens, a generous supply of bread. 'From propreitor of pill-grims Paradise and sister of same for Reverend Finley and gentelman.'

'How generous and good these people are!' said John. 'We despise them and think them mud. Yet what English man is there, or what English woman, who would have kept gratitude so steadfastly for the mere fact that I once did something for them when they were in trouble? And you see how they guessed that if you came you would stay, like the friend you are, and that we might find it hard to lay hands at once on what we needed!'

Robin said, 'Our whole civilisation is daft in all its values. We strut through the world on our blondness, and think we know the

universe ! And the Travel Company's half-caste meets us, and we suspect him and bully him and in the end pay his bill grudgingly ! Yet that fellow, to hold down his job, has to be a better linguist than any Professor in any University in the world ! *He* can't get through his days on a few silly periodicals, a handful of third-rate fiction, a smattering of *ghastly* French and still ghastlier Hindustani !'

' Yet aren't you exaggerating the amount of scholarship he needs ? '

' I certainly am *not* ! I've seen advertisements for a fellow able to interpret in some South African job, and he had to be *perfect*—according to the advertisement !—in English, French, German, Dutch, Afrikaans, and God knows what else ! with a bit of Zulu and Swazi and Basuto and Swahili thrown in ! And he was offered a couple of quid a week, and second-class fare out to his work ! Tell me what Professor in what university can honestly claim to know half what those jobs demand ! '

John nodded. And wondered how this outburst had arisen out of what they were talking about. But he knew Rob's mind, and its way

of starting from a theme, violently, and not along the main road, but up some side-track suddenly noticed.

Rob knew what he was wondering, and said, 'I was looking at poor Sandy MacNab's spelling and realising how funny we should think it. Never for a moment reminding ourselves that this poor devil of a Goanese spoke and wrote our language—and half a dozen other languages as well—a whole world better than we can speak or write his—or any other language barring our own!'

'Well,' said John slowly, 'the days of our pride are nearly finished and our race is about to come to judgment. And I think that from now on there will be more and more reason for the generous-minded (if any are going to be left in the earth) to look for extenuating circumstances and to find out the ways in which our pride had—well, *some*—justification!'

Robin started, and looked hard at him.

'You have called up the ghost in my own mind. Have you seen that ghost here, in this Central Indian wilderness?'

'Yes,' said John. 'And it stalks through

the minds of all our people.'

'You mean?'

'I mean this. There never was a time when our services contained so many men who felt they were in a losing battle, and felt sometimes that they could no longer stand up to the job they had to do. The older men are hanging on till they get their pensions and can clear out for ever, and the younger men know this and are asking themselves why they ever came.'

'Does India know this?'

'Of course India knows it. Rob, you're losing grip on yourself even to ask such a question! It was an Eastern book that told us that whatever we said in secret would be passed from mouth to mouth on the house-tops when the women went up there in the evening! India knows that we have passed judgment on ourselves, and that she must make her own future and choose her own course, leaving us aside.'

'I see now,' said Rob slowly, 'that this was the thought that was being forced in on me.'

'It is a thought that will grow and spread

in India. It is here now—oh, not altogether consciously as yet ! The thoughts that are to be the governing ideas of each period in our own lives come like watersprings before they are seen as rivers ! It is so with nations.'

'Yes,' said Robin. 'They ooze up in the subconscious rocks.'

'You used to call yourself the typical John Bull.'

'Naturally. Everyone knew it.'

'I doubt if the knowledge was as universal as all that ! However, if you—and I—are the typical Englishman, then what happens in *our* minds is what happens in the minds of the whole. England has given up empire *already*. She has finished *within herself*, and wants only to be allowed to linger out her days in coma. And of course everyone else knows this.'

'Yes,' said Robin, rising. 'They know it. And the rest of the National Programme will follow in a few minutes ! Now I want to ask you questions about yourself. And we've time to walk down to that river before it gets dark.'

Yet when they were back, and a lamp had been lit, it was to politics that they returned. What else is more interesting in these times in which we live ? Not talk politics ? When the Roman Empire is falling to barbarians, or the armies of the Sultan are battering at Vienna, or Napoleon has invaded Spain and has left very little else uninvaded ! Are you going to expect men to discuss Virgil or Wordsworth at times such as these ?

Politics have become our life ; and for many men and women their deaths, as the fires of destruction sweep through one land after another.

‘ I had only a few days in Calcutta,’ said Robin. ‘ And before that there was the boat, of course. It had a most appalling woman on it.’

‘ Every P. & O. has.’

‘ Oh yes. And there was an American journalist who did not bother to hide what he thought about us all.’

‘ What American journalist ever does ? ’

‘ Quite. He told me, “ Gosh, but what a

set of sahebs and memsahebs you are ! And Gosh ! how the whole world hates you ! Tell me a country where your name isn't mud ! ” ”

‘ Poor Robin ! It wasn't a cheering return ! ’

‘ No. It wasn't. And then I met the best journalist in India, and he said to me, “ Can you tell us if there is a single point at which your bloody Government will make a stand ? ” The European community were sore, you see, because the Japs had been allowed to beat up some of our bluejackets and smash their faces in—literally, smash them in—and we had let them get away with it.’

‘ The Japs are going to be let get away with bigger things presently.’

‘ Oh, quite. Hang it all, whatever dreadful thing anyone says now, one has to go on just quite-ing to it ! Because it's *true* ! But it was worrying this chap, sound Britisher though he was, because the Japs impress Indian opinion—being Asiatics, and Asiatics who jumped up into first-class power only yesterday ! And we let them knock our chaps about, and we do nothing. That's how India sees things.’

John nodded.

‘ Then there’s this fellow Franco in Spain. The woman on the boat was damned pleased about him ; he was going to clean up the beastly Reds and make everything jolly for British interests. He must be an awfully altruistic fellow, by her story ! But I had a chat with Colonel Blimp—again on the train from Bombay to Calcutta. He had come out to India in pre-Mutiny days, from all that I could discover, and he still thought that someone ought to be sacked over that mishandled Chilianwalla affair. We sat opposite one another in the luncheon car. And Colonel Blimp, though he seemed to lack every other sense, did have a rudimentary geographical sense. You see, he *knows*, because he’s done it, that you *have to cross the Mediterranean to get home* ! And he wanted to know why we were letting this Mussolini fellow get away with it.’

‘ Did you tell him ? ’

‘ Oh yes, I told him,’ said Robin wearily. ‘ Then in my brief sojourn in Calcutta I ran into——.’ He named a great Moslem statesman, a steadfast friend of the Raj and a power throughout the Princes’ territory. ‘ Well, *he*

wanted to know what I thought of the whole Palestine business, and what was likely to happen. And you could see that on the answer he could honestly give himself when I had finished depended the whole world of carefully poised adjustments—of British and Moslem, of East and West—of God knows how much else—all worked out in terms of compromise, in his soul and ours. A touch might tumble it into the abyss.’

‘ Did you tell him what you thought ? ’

‘ Of course I told him. My only value in this whole Indian scene is that everyone now expects me to say what I think. With a great price obtained I this freedom ! Yet I reminded him also that after the War India was facing a very tired nation, and that for some of our mistakes that tiredness was solely responsible.’

‘ What did he say to that ? ’

‘ Say ? He merely looked at me, and quoted Wordsworth. Not the “ kitten in the leaves ” Wordsworth, but the Wordsworth who sometimes said something. “ By no weak pity might the Gods be moved.” And I had to admit that I knew that in this world there

is a price to be paid for being tired, and no way of evading that price and its payment.'

'No,' John agreed. 'They won't be moved by any pity, weak or otherwise. But they have heavier charges against us than our tiredness !'

Rob considered this. Then, 'It's hard on you, John ! but I want to talk my mind out to the only man who can understand it. We've been here for—three hundred years, isn't it ?—and out of India have drained more of prestige and sheer material strength than anyone can ever compute. Our mere possession of it has been a purple robe which the world has envied us ! Yet apart from a handful of us, who have had Service or business interests in India from age to age—and *their* keenness has always had something of hysteria in it, and any amount of sharp-sighted fierceness to concentrate only on things that belonged to keeping those interests—it has been impossible to make our people care twopence about India ! No subject bores us as India does !'

'I know that.'

'We made up our minds ages ago that

there was nothing to be done about India except drift into it and out of it again—do our job while there—get what we could out of it—and then forget it for ever. Well, Nemesis—she's a slow-footed lady, but in the course of centuries she can get herself moving!—has caught us up at last, and *in this generation*! Gandhi hasn't seen it entirely yet, for he's a conservative old gentleman, if there ever was one, and nothing short of a Jalianwala massacre periodically would ever really shake him off co-operating with us! But I have learnt now that others have seen it! have seen that all India need do is quietly to shake herself presently, and we shall disappear! Oh, not all at once, John! We both of us know that! But it's begun to happen, and is going to happen steadily more and more! India after millenniums is finding her own path again, and that path is one which is going to sidestep the British Empire. There was a time when the stars seemed to hesitate. But we hesitated too, and that settled it. But when did we go wrong, John?'

'We had the bad luck,' said John slowly, 'to win the War. So we assumed that every-

thing was all right, and could go on with a bit of patching and mending. Whereas other nations have overhauled themselves from top to bottom ! They have been throwing away more than political trappings, more than imitation Parliaments and democracies ! They've been throwing away the mould and shape which civilisation has worn for fifteen hundred years.'

Presently Rob said, ' If you ask me, the two outstanding tragedies of the post-War world have been the disappearance of the Liberal Party—I mean the Liberal Party that in its half-dozen years of real power at last really did real things—and the disappearance of the Ottoman Empire. Yes, I said the Ottoman Empire ! Its very rottenness gave it effectiveness. It was like a thoroughly waterlogged breakwater ; it could gather in any amount of additional tides and just sway to and fro, because it was already solidly liquid. Yes, solidly liquid is what I said, and it seems to me it was what I meant to say ! And so was the old British Empire and the old civilisation, and old system generally, solidly liquid.'

‘And so,’ said John, ‘is India still, whatever the rest of the world may be. She’s a waterlogged debris of Princes and Congress, of Muslims and Sikhs and Hindus and Christians and British, of Marxists and ultra-orthodox, all trying to plug-in together somehow or other. And we’ve made her a break-water of locks and barriers, emergency powers and weightage and all the rest, a general jumble that we hope will keep the whole show put.’

‘So you sit on this silent watch-tower in Central India and listen to dead men’s voices in the night ! As they plot against the helpless living !’

‘Yes.’

3

They talked far into the morning, men whose intimacy was so deep and strong that there was no need for haste ; everything could come at leisure and as it showed itself.

For both, the time had come to wind up their lives. Presently one would go down from this hill, and close the work to which he had set himself when entering manhood. And one, for a while longer, would remain here.

Meghachura, a moon-suffused cloud clinging to its summit, made the rough semblance of a head turned in profile, in stillness of meditation. Robin was reminded, and said, 'It's queer—to *us*, that is—the way the Buddha forsook wife and child.'

'You know this is the outskirts of his country?' said John. Robin nodded. 'That brook is the beginning of *antasalila Phalgu*, Phalgu whose water has sunk within, into its sands. They say that part of his seven years of seeking was passed in this very valley. It was near to this brook that he found Enlightenment, lower down, where it flows through the plain.'

'That was what put me in mind of him. And I was saying that you won't get the Western mind past that episode. Not *really* past it! Hang it all, our minds argue, If a chap had married he had married, and his duty was to his wife, and not to humanity. And if a child had been born, his duty was to that child. How could he go off and found a *religion*—if he started in that fashion?'

'I know. That is how we argue.'

'What do you make of it?' Robin asked.

‘ This, I think. East and West start their whole philosophy of life and existence on different bases. *We* think of the individual, *they* of the process. We say, I am I, and you are you, and the very fact that we come into contact with each other sets up duties between us. And if you are my son or my wife, then I, an individual, have set up duties to you, another individual—very close and binding duties, between two very sacred things. Individuality is to us the peak and purpose of the whole cosmic process. But it *isn't* to these fellows ! To them the individual is merely part of phenomena, part of the waves which the cosmic process throws up and forgets as soon as it has tossed them into this momentary sunlight which you and I call our lives ! Buddha belonged, not to his wife and child—not to them at all ; they were merely bonds, which you remember was the actual name that he gave his son when he was born—but to the whole process of creation, which was endlessly striving, in birth after rebirth, to sink back *into God*, to find its way *back to God*. If he could discover the way to achieve this, then he had helped

the whole of sentient life back to the eternal peace ! When he left his wife, what was he leaving ? Not the kind of being we imagine, in our Western romantic ideas of woman, and not our sort of union. Not that at all ! You remember how Buddhist writings keep on dwelling on the disordered appearance of women when they lie asleep, hot and dishevelled. And the way they dwell on—well, other things, that don't fit in with the romantic idea in the least—to put it mildly ! He left merely the being who was a drag on his purpose, on the job for which he was born.'

Findlay, with his own tense memories, talking this nihilist philosophy with such calmness, in that quiet autumnal Indian night in the forest ! But that is the gift which age brings in its hands : you can silence your suffering heart, and out on some portico far from your secret recesses can talk with the world and dispassionately examine whatever notions it brings.

Robin lay silent ; then he said, ' Yes. And it's *queer* that it still puzzles us so. For St. Paul is simply crammed with stuff that makes you

feel how much closer his thought was to that of Buddhism than it is to ours—which we imagine is the true-blue Christian doctrine. He is always dreaming of that cosmic process in which are all things, in which all things consist and cohere.’

‘Yes,’ said Findlay. ‘He is.’

‘Which of us is right?’

And the heartache in both gave the same answer. ‘It is the individual who has made *everything* for me,’ Robin said. ‘And well I know it, for all that my destiny sends me out hither and yon, an eternal wanderer.’

‘It made it for me also,’ said John.

He broke out presently, ‘It is the individual who makes it now. You know what my life is. I have done with boards and stations and organisations. I am in these hills, where you get a folk even more primitive than my lambs at Kanthala were. I had, and have, enough money to last out my time without taking a penny from anyone; my living expenses are small enough! I’ve my people scattered through these villages, here and there a few who have turned Christian. I mean,’ said Findlay slowly, ‘really Chris-

tian ; not perfect, not saintly, but aware that they have seen a vision, and that behind the vision is a fact. And that fact, Rob, is a *person*. We've turned our modern Christianity clean out of the primitive village where it started.'

' Because modern civilisation has turned all of *us* out of it ! Because we've turned ourselves out of it ! '

' We've put Christianity in buildings where no one can feel really at home. Whereas '—Findlay's voice grew quiet—' if any man open, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. It's that way we have forgotten to look at it, Rob. But you can look at it that way here ! You can see again the intimacy of the whole thing ! someone just lifting a latch and coming in ! and then you share together a few olives and brown unleavened bread. They *come in*, and they *sup with you*, and they *stay with you*. When that has happened—what difference can death make ? '

The forest, though still, was not without stirrings. Presently it became suddenly and altogether silent, as though with all its myriad minds the wilderness was tensely

listening. Rob noticed it, and commented on it.

‘ Yes. That means that my neighbour from upstream is coming,’ said John.

‘ Your neighbour ? ’

‘ Yes. Every night, about this time, a tiger walks down the stream’s other bank, crosses by that big rock which you saw, and then his beat takes him past my window.’

‘ Good heavens ! what do you do about it ? ’

‘ Nothing. He knows I’m here ; and he knows I’m harmless. He’s very regular ; about 3 A.M. is his time, or a little before it. I’m usually asleep. If I’m not, then I go to sleep after he’s passed. He never seems to come back the same way.’

This settled sleep for Robin. He lay listening, and some time later heard—three times in succession, and then, after a longish interval, once—the grumble of a tiger smelling the way as he went. He evidently knew that the bungalow held a fresh occupant, and he took a little time to make sure that he was innocuous. When the tiger had gone, Robin saw that John was asleep. He himself tossed sleeplessly until it was dawn.

CHAPTER VII

ON the third day, Robin went. John accompanied him to Pilgrims' Paradise.

A skirting path led them by remains of old-time cultivation, long abandoned but scarring still the hillside. In and out of the bushes, a rainbow lacing, ran *Gloriosa*, the climbing lily. It is most at home in the fierce hot levels, in lagoon-and-inlet-broken plains of India's extremest south or the hedgerows of the coastal Carnatic, but accepts a wide range of latitude and temperature.

They crossed the stream, and mounted into a region of subalpine flowers : marigolds, borage, and at foot of a sliding water-drip, tall pink balsams. They reached the Bibigarh, the tiny palace where the Rani and her women used to overlook a wide sunken plateau built for the holding of festivals. Here too was a stone platform, on which Rajas formerly sat to dispense gifts to Brahmins

expectantly massed on the plateau. Seven thousand at a time, tradition asserted, had been fed and given largess in gold ; how a trivial Mahratta principality bore the expense no one bothered to enquire. No doubt audits of income and expenditure would have been impious. Some duties transcend budgets.

The fortress walls were a couple of hundred feet higher yet. With eyes practised in wild and rugged straits they estimated the time it would take to short-circuit the road to it ; they could see, by gaps and intervals in the forest, both the road and a possible track which ran by a direct cut to the mighty gates. They chose the track and presently passed through those gates and up the stone-paved elephant-way, into the fort, under a luxuriant outcrop of maidenhair and remains of a white-racemed lily still in partial flower. On the hill-summit, in the space and silence where had been a busy palace and throngs of courtiers and soldiers, they sat down and rested.

‘ It’s queer,’ said Robin, ‘ how we die out completely, from the places which we filled

to the exclusion of any other thought in connection with them. I know nothing that gives an eerier stab to the mind than to realise this, and dwell on it.'

'Do you think we do die out?'

'Yes.'

'I'm not so sure. I've passed this way by night, and alone; and have been conscious that it was filled with its old life, and with beings that moved and thought and felt—here, in this deserted fortress where no one comes! and I the living man was walking through their midst. Oh, they were taking no notice of *me*! They may not have known I was there, though somehow I think some of them did! This world, about which we think we know all there is to know, has its different planes of existence, and they go on side by side. You think I've gone mad?'

'No. I think you know—*what* you know, John! And that knowledge is part of what has worried me for years, my dear!'

'It need not, Rob. For the very fact that I have learnt that sometimes this spirit of ours can seem to escape for a while from the body—while it is still in the body—has been and is

my safety. For the body always remains a refuge into which it can slip back. And bolt and bar the doors. If it wants to.'

'Tell me what you have *seen*, John.'

'No. For one can't be *sure*—not dead sure—about the *facts* of the seeing. But I'm not the only one that has seen—or thinks he has seen ! There's not one of the fellows in this jungle who will come this way by night, for they say that every step of the road is haunted with passion. The Rani of Jhansi rides this way, they say ; the report that she was killed in battle was all wrong, and it was to this old Mahratta fortress that she made her way after defeat. Somewhere in these hills she disappeared—made into a goddess, they believe, and still from this summit, as from a watch-tower, looking to the things to come in India ! They have stories of older suffering than hers : of the founder-adventurer who made this petty kingdom, and of the guardian deity who told him to come here—a kind of Hindu Egeria who lived for four generations and was semi-divine, at every juncture in its affairs appearing—as an old beggar woman, usually, but she took other forms—and telling

what the Raja should do. She was disobeyed in 1857, and went back to her native heaven and was never seen on earth again as human. But the people in these hills have seen her, and they don't *like* seeing her.'

'That's all a yarn for your anthropologists, John.'

'Of course. And so perhaps is every yarn they tell you here. But I'm getting less and less sure of some things. I often wonder why, if this universe is a place run by spirit and for spirit, we have always been sure that all we had to do, in order to get rid of a man, was to kill him. *If* there is a spirit world—and up to this day the whole of Christendom and Islam, and a great many reasonably sane men and women who belong to neither, officially allege that they hold there is—I can imagine that the most dangerous thing you could do is to drive your enemy out of this life, into a life where he might have infinitely more power and at the same time be exempt from anything you could do. I wonder if at the end, when the veil over all existence is lifted, we may not see that from age to age this world has been the playground and battleground of

spirit forces, and we ourselves half puppets, not in the grip of any mechanistic determinism, but in the impulsion of forces living like ourselves, but living far more grimly and ruthlessly, and also,' he added to himself, 'far more kindly and gently and wisely, God help us.'

Rob pondered this, and as they went on again said: 'I've wondered more and more why our Christian Modernists, who were determined to hang on to the major superstition—that there is a personal God—are so cocksure that the quite minor superstition that there's a personal Devil is so *prima facie* silly that anyone who even toys with it puts himself beyond the intellectual pale. Queer, the number of folk who *say* they believe that *God* stands to reason, yet say also, "But of course He's all goodness, and so there cannot be any really powerful wickedness loose in the world, outside the tiny region where mankind functions, for that would be unthinkable! God would never allow it!" What do they think they know about God? They can see that everywhere and every day He *is* allowing, whether willingly or nillywillingly

is another question, things which it is unthinkable that a God who was both good and his own master ever *could* allow. They are dead sure that the spirits of just men made perfect go on functioning ! Yet apparently the abundant evil spirits that become discarnate go into some eternal ineffectiveness. In short,' he concluded, 'in all the arguments of the last few years one argument has tacitly been abandoned. You can explain anything that goes wrong by *any* psychological or pseudo-psychological rot you like to espouse : you can put it down to bad education, or no education at all, or to suppressions and inhibitions, or to sex or mental deficiency : or you can explain it economically. But you must never put it down to sheer deliberate wickedness, human or diabolical, or human *and* diabolical. Anyway, what do you and I, alone on a hill-top in Central India where not half a dozen men of our race have ever penetrated, know of anything, John ? Except that there is only one safe way, and only one way to even happiness, and that is decency. And I'm not going to argue what that is. I prefer to send you to Christ and

Paul and Buddha, who all in their different fashions were very sure that they knew, and that everyone who *wanted* to know *could* know !’

CHAPTER VIII

I

JOHN said presently, 'We'd better get back to the road to Pilgrims' Paradise. I took you off it, to show you our Fort. We'll do a straight scramble down, to save time.'

Fig and teak had rooted in crevices of cyclopean walls—half splitting what they would need millenniums to shatter and break down altogether—half strengthening, as by massive pegs in-driven. Taking advantage of a peepul so rooted, they swung themselves down a lesser precipice, merely an inner wall. The outward defences were a rock-face fifty feet in height.

As they looked back, Rob remembered the chained *ghorpad*, and told of the incident. 'I wonder if the legends were so steep, after all ! Perhaps both men and lizards found roots that offered foothold, and discovered it wasn't all sheerly perpendicular, in the way

we imagine when we hear the yarn.'

'You say you *saw* the lizard?'

'I had his chain in my hand.'

John stood still, and laughed. 'I remember now, there *is* a yarn, that the old Bargigarh Rajas' family always keep one of the wretched brutes roaming round dragging a chain, in gratitude for the services rendered when the first Raja and his men were pulled up over the walls by these creatures.'

'Gratitude!'

'Why, yes. There's a silver inscription on the chain and an etching on each heavy link, of a *ghorpad* pulling a Mahratta up a sheer precipice.'

'Would not a neat neck-piece have served to attest the donor's thankful remembrance, and at the same time have left the poor beast less inconvenienced?'

'Ah, but they want to be able to lay hands on him again, if necessary!'

'I see! Once a *ghorpadier*, always a *ghorpadier*!'

'That's the notion! You never know (the family argue) when you may want a *ghorpad* to hoist you up a precipice again! So they

keep this fellow so that he can't run too far or too fast when they need to catch him. Rather like a horse ready saddled and bridled and hobbled. But I don't often come this way, and I didn't take the yarn seriously. I propose we find him now, and do our day's good deed.'

Reaching the place where Robin had seen the *ghorpad*, they hunted for him. He could not be found. 'I'll keep an eye out for him on my rounds,' said John, 'and release him later.'

A Sonthal child appeared out of the brush. She came as if running lightly on levels of firm easy sand, and not in this tangle of thorns and stumps—her black hanging locks matted and like tree-roots wildly disposed. The elf beckoned, and the Englishmen followed her to a ring of colossal stones embossing the hillside. Here she thrust her hand down a hole, and pulled out the end of a chain. All three of them tugged at it. Dusty and protesting, the *ghorpad* emerged.

But they could do nothing for him. His chain needed a file, it had no lock or catch in it.

‘ I wonder how he’s managed to survive,’ said Robin. ‘ One would think him meat all laid on a platter, for any jackal that came across him ! They reckon a *ghorpad* pretty toothsome, don’t they—if they can catch one ! ’

‘ The clank-clank-clank scares them off. I guess they imagine he’s another of man’s infernal and endless devilries. We must be an eternal bad dream to the beast world. They never get to the end of us.’

Robin rewarded the girl, who salaamed and solemnly withdrew. The lizard delved sullenly into his depths, drawing after him that dully gleaming trail.

2

Gazing over the miles of downward-dipping forest, Rob sighed at the beauty outspread before him, and the peace of this forsaken jungle on the heights. In the sigh were happiness and the release of his mind in restfulness ; and sorrow also, for a peace that was doomed.

‘ Does it ever strike you, John,’ he asked,

‘ that Christianity’s at heart a pretty *hard-boiled* religion ? It hasn’t much place for pity ! There’s not a word suggesting that it’s man’s duty to live in amity with his world. And that’s why you can have, and do have, crowds of deeply and passionately Christian men and women, who can get all excited about questions of vesture or the right way to celebrate the sacraments, and all worried about the parish church falling into decay, and still more worried because Dissenters are forging ahead ! yet they don’t feel one atom of pity for living beings which they plug full of holes or chase to their death ! Not one atom of pity ! not one moment of admiration or wonder ! Even after accepting the doctrine of Evolution we grant the lower creation no sort of rights ! And not for one moment does it strike us that perhaps the Creator had a purpose in filling the world with other creatures than ourselves, and *may care* about them ! Anyone who suggests this, however timidly, is a sentimentalist. And the worst of it is, I as a Christian can’t say that these Christians are wrong. Christ had no doctrine of *ahimsa* or harmlessness, as the Buddha had.’

‘What about “Consider the lilies”?’ asked John.

‘Oh yes,’ said Robin impatiently. ‘Consider them! Consider them all you like, and be frightfully pleased because they get their full ration of sun and rain, whether they toil or not, and from that fact draw the conclusion that your Heavenly Father will see to it that *you* get it also, and so must stop fussing and worrying! Yes, and *you—may—*get your ration! But millions of poor devils won’t, and don’t! I’m talking blasphemy, John, old friend. But God doesn’t mind my talking blasphemy on a Central Indian hillside. He knows that times come when I’ve no other way out but to get the blasphemy looked squarely in the face! You said something about lilies. Lilies aren’t living things. They don’t *feel*.’

‘What about the five sparrows sold for two farthings? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father.’

‘Yes, John.’ He turned and looked at his friend. ‘But they *do* fall to the ground! And what’s worse, they go on being sold for two farthings! The Heavenly Father *knows*, all

right. But He *does* nothing ! And there's not one word anywhere that suggests that He ever will do anything, or that we ought to help Him to do anything ! I sometimes think that in this one respect Paul the servant had more to say than the Master ; he is, at least, haunted by the thought of the whole creation groaning together, waiting for the manifestation of a race of man that at last—at last, John ! after God knows how long of so-called civilisation !—will show some sort of decency towards the poor brutes who can't make bows and arrows and sharp spears to impale other brutes as they run, and can't make foul things that go off and maim and blind and smash soft bodies ! You and I, John, have passed our lives away serving a vision, and it is the world's finest vision. But it's got its blind spot. It isn't *merciful* ! It never *was* merciful ! It's hard-boiled, as I said. It draws your attention to the five sparrows being sold for one farthing, and then it draws the wrong conclusion. It doesn't go on to say that it's a damnable shame that they should be tied together by the feet and hung fluttering to be sold, two for one farthing ! It

merely says that Your Heavenly Father *knows* all about it—and *doesn't mind*, apparently !—and that *you* have the right to feel snug in your silly inner self, because He dismisses *them* as of no importance ! having *seen* them, duly seen and duly noted, as if He were the head office of some Central Government to which all the files and minutes come in and get docketed ! And He is going to look after *you* ! When a God like that *doesn't* look after you, despite His promise, what right have you to feel surprised ? I'm not sure that I *want* Him to look after me ! '

John made no answer, and they walked on in silence. After a while Rob continued. ' I've learnt that the old-time persecutions of Christians *by* Christians, and all the cruelty done in the name of Christ, are worrying thinking people now as they never did before ! Their minds are arguing, John, and can't help arguing, for it's in the spirit of our age, that there *must* have been something hard and unfeeling at the very heart of a religion that in its professors, and many of its finest professors at that, could come out in such utter vileness.'

‘Then you think,’ asked John, ‘that Hinduism is more pitiful?’

‘Up to a point, and in a way, yes. Oh yes—*theoretically*! which seems to be as much as you can expect of any religion,’ said Rob, bitterly. ‘Yes, Hinduism *teaches ahimsa*, harmlessness!’

‘Teaches it, as you say. *And* talks about it publicly, in season and out of season. But where is the Hindu who cares about it to-day?’

‘I know! I remember when I was last in New Delhi, six years ago, a fellow came and hung about the hotel veranda steps, pestering us to give him pice because he’d caught a small flock of the loveliest little golden birds you ever saw, and was tossing them up into the air and then pulling them back to him by almost invisible threads attached to their legs. That was all he did! and he thought he ought to be paid for doing it! He was a good Hindu, all right! had his caste marks all conspicuous!’

‘And none of the other good Hindus thought he was doing anything he shouldn’t do?’ (Robin nodded agreement). ‘Robin,

Robin, I thought you had got wise to the whole majestic humbug of this Indian controversy. Your "friend of India" chitchats blithely about the Hindu passion for *ahimsa*, in every book he writes and every speech he makes ! But I thought that Rob Alden knew better, and knew that *ahimsa* went out ages ago—if it ever was in !'

'God help the poor bird !' ejaculated Robin, remembering Christacharan's captives. He made a mental note to tell John the story ; and answered him now. 'Well—how can you expect *ahimsa* still to lift its head anywhere, when the Indian press blathers about sport-loving Maharajas who can chase down in high-powered cars a bunch of black buck, and mop the whole lot up inside of five minutes ? When the whole population of a Native State is turned out in mass, compulsorily, as it was only a week ago, because its Ruler had just shot his five hundredth tiger ? When the highest officials congratulated him, and everyone made a fuss that would be slightly absurd if His Highness had completed a new *Divine Comedy* or discovered a cure for cancer ! When "Our Special Corre-

spondent" assures us that "all Simla" is excited over Lady Blank's bear, and how frightfully keen on sport is this and that Excellency ! You have the most sycophantic population in the whole world infesting this country ! *Naturally* they admire what their Rulers keep on assuring them is most utterly and absolutely admirable ! '

' Yes, they admire it. Even so—they've reservations that we never see, Rob. Somewhere at the back of its mind India keeps a memory of the King's Son who passed his days harmlessly, yet without fear—in these forests ! ' said John. ' I suppose it's old-fashioned to quote Clough ! But it's pretty much as he says !—

I have seen higher holier things than these——

higher and holier than this New Delhi and Princely India system, for all its merits of internal order and some sort of liberty to pass through life to death without starvation—if you can manage to find food ! But *higher* and *holier*—Asoka, as well as Buddha—and therefore—*therefore* ! a good enough reason, Rob ! —" must to these my heart refuse ! " ' "

Robin agreed. 'Yes, we think the hidden contempt doesn't matter, so long as the press is noisily for us and the whole outward show in the streets is huzzaing ! But a man may be salaaming while inwardly he's all corroded with sedition, and if he dared would shrug his shoulders and pass on. Isn't that the attitude of our folk at home—in heaps of matters ? They know a thing is wrong as well as imbecile. But they say, "We can do nothing about it. So let's give a cheer, as our bosses demand, and pass on to what concerns our daily wage and daily bread." All the same ' (as he took a last long gaze over the expanse of dipping vale and stretching forest), 'you won't get me to believe that all this loveliness was made for no purpose except to harbour living beings to be swept together at stated times into one place to be slaughtered.'

'If the old primitive blood sacrifices persist, don't blame it on to God, Robin ! After all, there was a time when these Princes and rich idiots had their wives burned with them when they died, and it wasn't *their* doing that the custom finally went.'

‘ I know,’ Rob admitted. ‘ Yet why *didn’t* Christ say *something*—if only a sentence or two !—about man’s duty to the other beings ? For there must *be* a duty ! They *must* mean something—this whole world at our very doors, which is as mysterious to us now, in the workings of its brains (and it *has* brains !), as it was when man lived beside it, as part of it, in the forests ! ’

‘ Why *should* Christ have said anything ? It wasn’t a problem in His days ? ’

‘ No, I suppose not. No one went about Palestine butchering for fun, unless it was an occasional Roman centurion who was recognised to be eccentric, or some half-witted malignant who had nothing better to do. If a wolf took one of your kids, or a gazelle came into your wheat, you drove them off ; and if you could, you killed them. Otherwise, you did your job, and they kept to theirs. All the same, I wish Christ had said *something* besides that unsatisfactory sparrows remark ! ’

‘ I think He *has* said it. That it is being said now. “ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy ! ” You and I know exactly how merciful we are, as that poor

brute of a *ghorpad* thought he knew when we lugged him out and he came so tremblingly ! And I can see and hear the kind of mercy that is going to be meted out presently to all the nations that have prided themselves on being civilised ! When that happens, we shall know that, by all the savagery and selfishness which have ignored the suffering of men and beasts, we have raised a tidal wave that is sweeping back on ourselves. It is small pity that man anywhere deserves ; and unless the ghost that has talked to me here when I have been alone has been lying to me, it is small pity that man anywhere is going to receive.'

3

At Pilgrims' Paradise they had just sat down to refreshment (which MacNab insisted they must take as his guests), when a grey-haired old woman glided swiftly in from behind the screen, touched Findlay's feet and laid her head on them for one moment, to disappear as quickly as she had come, shaken with weeping. Alden remembered Wordsworth's testimony that it was ' the gratitude '

of men that had often left him mourning. Gratitude for kindness when an unimportant child lies dying is, of course, a thing out of all sanity and proportion, in a world crowded with majestic events. And India is absurdly moved by the tiny life of the home. Still, if men and women have nothing else—why, they have nothing else, and this is their world.

John returned to Meghachura, and Robin spent one more night at Pilgrims' Paradise. Nothing of note happened in it.

At departure, however, he asked, being a man willing to investigate deviations from convention, why his bedroom was as it had been left by its occupants of yesteryear, and was informed that this was 'a good arrangement. Once one of officers complain that his things stole, that money stole. So now I have *strict rule* that Staff must never enter bedroom.'

MacNab admitted sadly that this rule did not properly cover the bathroom, whose dirty water had not been poured away. 'But' (brightening) 'next week I am getting Butler.'

Robin paid his bill, and they parted with mutual esteem.

PART III

LAST DAYS AS A MISSIONARY EDUCATIONIST

CHAPTER I

I

BACK at Vishnugram, in his renewed loneliness Alden was comforted to have been with Findlay. He had a sense of time come back, in the memory of his friend's eyes smiling upon him, and on the absurdities which encompassed him. They had once stood in this stream of existence together.

He was an utterly unimportant person. Yet from time to time the community made him aware that he was regarded with some affection. It gave him more happiness than he willingly admitted, even to himself.

The first sign was at the time of the Bhadu *puja*. This *puja* is for a goddess whose name appears in none of the manuals, who is as yet unacknowledged by the Hindu hierarchy. Her cult is local to the Vishnugram division, and arose in this manner. Eighty years ago the deeply loved baby daughter of a zemindar

died, and her heart-broken father started a feast in her honour on the anniversary of her death, to keep her name alive while he lived. He has been more successful than he ever hoped. The community have made ' Bhadu ' into a goddess, no one knows how or when or why. Many begin to incline to the opinion that she was undoubtedly an incarnation of the great national goddess. And her cult has taken the right road to divinity. Night by night, over a whole week, her devotees parade the roads, singing songs in her praise—religious songs—that is, smutty songs. It is not considered safe for decent women to be abroad, and a movement to stop the festival would be approved by the orthodox and old-fashioned. It would not, however, be popular.

During the Bhadu *pūja* the Raja of Lekteswar's baby daughter died. The father called on Alden. And again the sardonic Powers who govern everything Indian saw fit to mingle with the heart-breaking the grotesque.

In an avenue of white-flowering fragrant bush-jasmine, which Alden himself had planted ten years previously and coaxed into

contentment with an arid soil, the Raja's elephant waited. The brute's master had his back to the crime that was perpetrated, and Alden was too moved by his sorrow to draw attention to it.

Yet it went to the Englishman's heart to have to watch over his guest's shoulder, seated on his front veranda, while that voracious trunk swayed upward, then flung itself round bush after bush and with one strong tug tore out each by its roots—to strip the leaves neatly and swiftly off and thrust them down a capacious throat, and toss the plant aside for the next victim. The avenue, and ten years of slow difficult cherishing, went; and the mahout, lolling on the elephant's back, did not consider that what was happening called for any action from him. Pray that your friends, when they come to visit you, may leave their elephants at home!

'I wish to establish Football Cup,' the Raja told Robin. Tears streamed down his cheeks. 'Final must always be played on anniversary of child's death, and I will give money for the cup and for medals for the

winning team. And you ' (he pressed Robin's hand) ' must be President, and must bring out your wife to give away cup and medals.'

' I shall not be here,' said Robin sadly.

' But you will at least stay until the first award ! For without you no one will think the cup should be given. It is the College which taught all our boys to play football and cricket and hockey, and whenever we see one who plays well we say, " He is Alden Saheb's pupil, without doubt ! " The cup is to be called Lakshmi Cup, because Lakshmi was name of my girl.'

Robin shook his head. ' I shall not be here,' he repeated.

Eighty years ago, the dead became a goddess ; in 1936, the patron saint of a Football Cup !

Robin had to go into Calcutta the next day, and came on other signs of the way the Age was going. Radha Babu, his own science professor, was also travelling on the same train. Questioned in the friendly probing manner of India, he looked sheepish, and then admitted that he was going to bathe in the Ganges on a particularly holy midnight,

at his grandmother's insistence. While they were talking together on the station platform, a leading Vishnugram merchant came up to them ; he too admitted that he was going to bathe in the sacred river. ' But real wish is to buy motor lorry.' So that was that ! He was going to Calcutta—to bathe in Ganges—and to buy a motor lorry.

Robin returned from Calcutta, *not* having bathed in the Ganges, to find that he was without a science professor. Radha Babu, thanks to his grandmother's orders, had caught a thundering cold, which sent him to bed for the rest of Alden's stay at the College, and nearly carried him off altogether.

Another mark of esteem was awarded by the best voice of all, the popular voice. It occurred to some connoisseurs of public opinion that their countrymen obtained much joy from dwelling on Mr. Gandhi's name and merits. They got up a MONSTER COMPETITION, with STAGGERING GIFTS FOR ALL. The Competition was in two parts, English and vernacular ; for six weeks all you had to do was to write ' Mahatma Gandhi ' as many times as you possibly could, and then send

up your achievement (along with eight annas). The person who had written 'Mahatma Gandhi' oftenest was to win something breath-catching in its magnificence.

A large section of literate India scamped all other duties for this delight. Families concentrated their energies. Whenever Rakhal or Bipin or little Lakshmi could manage it, school lessons or home tasks were flung aside, and some precious minutes put into writing *Mahatma Gandhi*, *Mahatma Gandhi*, *Mahatma Gandhi*. This had gone on for nearly the scheduled six weeks when suddenly a chilling fear exhaled like a mist.

We *know* (for the organisers so assure us) that the competitions of our own country are 'hundred per cent authentic.' There is no hanky in England. Why, sometimes famous authors are fee'd to act as judges, and they could not make any mistake.

But India is an untrustful country, where suspicion has a way, once started, of running wild. How it arose, no one knew; but a demand was made that Reverend Alden should be co-opted on to the Board which

counted the writings, or at any rate should vet the result. 'Whole Province has confidence in Rev. Alden,' a poster announced. The scheme's organisers recognised the strength of public feeling, and bowed to it, announcing, on the very day when all competitors' work (and eight-anna postal orders) had to be in (which by a coincidence was also the day when the organisers went into complete retirement), that 'Rev. Alden has been put on Board.'

As Rev. Alden had not been consulted before this honour, he was bewildered to receive the spate of mail which followed. He made enquiries, saw his name on posters, and sent to the press letters repudiating connection with the Competition. The repudiation was only partly successful. When the competitors learnt that their immense and protracted labours (and eight-anna contributions) had disappeared where none could trace them, there was a temporary lapse from affection for the political leader whose name they had written so many thousands of times. There was also an unjustified feeling that they had been let down by Rev. Alden. A Nationalist

paper made the inescapable suggestion that the whole affair had been got up by Government to bring Mahatmajee into disrepute ; ' and Rev. Alden has been undoubtedly used as catspaw.'

After rueful consideration, Robin decided to award high marks to the organisers of the Competition for sense of humour. He did not grudge it that he himself had been left holding with Mahatma Gandhi the dirty end of the stick.

A third mark of esteem was endorsed by the Government, not usually Robin's admirer. In the spring of the new year the elections under the new Constitution would be held. Congress was still hivering about the possibility of non-co-operating ; whether this meant merely that office would be refused, or would go so far as to include refusal to stand for election, no one knew. At any rate, Alden, whose College duties would then have finished, was asked to act as Returning Officer for the Vishnugram district. He accepted.

2

Jawaharlal Nehru was touring South India, hitherto so lightly drawn to the Congress and its ways—South India, which is so unlike India the political and historical entity. Rumour and echoing of wildly cheering crowds pierced even to Vishnugram. The grim stern face was conquering there, as elsewhere. Conquering his own people, that is ; the Muhammadans stood more aloof than ever, and it was more certain than ever that in the womb of the old India, struggling to be born, were two nations tugging and fighting for mastery even before birth.

Perhaps the British have been but an episode, and with their passing from the scene the old strife of Mogul and Maratha will be taken up again. The Marathas were already aloof from ‘Gandhi-raj,’ scornfully recalling that Mahatmajee was but a Gujarati, member of an unwarlike tribe whom their ancestors annually overran, pillaging their fields in the time of standing corn. And if the Muslim-Hindu wars reawakened, South

India also would take sides in them, aligned as to religion.

There were beginnings of this, even in Nehru's triumphant touring. At one place Muslim zealots blocked his path with elephants whose backs were crowded with noise-making instruments. Mahatmajee would have smiled sadly, and waved a deprecating hand ; and have waited—as he would wait, if the body lasted out, until aeons and *kalpas* had gone by. He was of the timeless East ; Nehru was not. Nehru, who still in his only partly regenerate soul keeps a loyalty as Harrovian, Nehru the Englishman who has had the bad luck to carry that spirit into an Indian incarnation—Nehru, the papers said, had betrayed annoyance. Alden could believe it.

Not only in the hills and uplands behind Bombay, not only in quiet South India, in Calcutta also the ancient strife was raising its head. In connection with Calcutta University, Robin had to visit the capital, and to note how even in the groves of learning swords were being sharpened. Bigots had combed Rabindranath Tagore's works, and had

found names of heathen deities. This was dreadful! you could not ask Muhammadan youths, trained in austere monotheism, even to know that such names had ever been breathed on Indian air! Poems were unearthed in which some noxious Brahmin appeared, talking noxious sentiments all about his priestly pre-eminence, in noxious language steeped in noxious idolatry. It was in vain that Hindus protested that any half-wit could see that the Brahmin was held up to reprobation as an obvious villain, an Indian Pecksniff or Chadband. Muhammadans, who (like all Puritans everywhere) seem to shed their sense of humour when they shed their other sins, did not see this, and fierce demands rose that Bengali literature be purified. The *Autobiography* of the Maharshi, Tagore's sainted father, was discovered to contain a passage in which he tells how his own aged mother when dying uttered the immemorial Hindu invocation, 'Call on Krishna's Name!' This was too terrible! and must be excised. Otherwise Muslim boys, reading it, would learn that there were actually fellow-inhabitants of Bengal who

sometimes mentioned the Dark-Blue God ! Bengali literature must be purified, and made fit for Muslims to inhabit.

Even so, once upon a time, Cromwell's soldiers went about smashing our sinful cathedrals, making them fit for Praise-God Barebones to twangle his psalms there. But why did they leave English literature alone ? Chaucer has several passages which indicate a knowledge of Roman Catholicism. These should have been cut out long ago.

It was urged likewise that culture should be on a sound communal basis. Let every Hindu professor be balanced by a Muslim one. Let a man be appointed to teach history, not because he was a sound historian, but because he was a sound bigot. Two Hindus, a publicist pointed out, had been awarded the Nobel Prize. Before any further awards were made, there should now be two Muhammadan awards.

They had to be fitted together, by the slow welding of the alien Empire that was passing or by the hot amalgam of blood and anger, these two Indias ! the India of unslaked antagonisms and fiercely blazing passions

and the self-respecting India of work and agitation ! Alden the Englishman visualised Gandhi grim in his Central Indian hut, like a spider feeling out to the land's edges and sending his tremors along a thousand invisible lines ; or, in an exaltation of penance freely endured for his country's sins, spending himself in the meanest and basest tasks among its lowest and poorest ! Ah, but there were threads which hung outside the web which the spider was weaving ! There were ardours which would not dissipate themselves in the abnegation of service !

CHAPTER II

I

ROBIN had to journey to Madras to see the Indian Head of the Board that was to take over the College. His business finished, he turned temporarily to pleasure, ran up to Madura and again saw its renowned immense temple. Every Englishman who finds himself sliding into 'left wing' or anti-imperial views should visit Madura periodically. It will restore his faith. In fact, if he keeps away from New Delhi and P. & O. steamers, that faith need never be seriously shaken at all.

For Madura is always amazing. It stuns and sandbags. You must reassure your mind by remembrance that if this is a dream it is one that so many have dreamt that it must be true ! Incredible that any animal which could think (let alone the people who are so often extolled as the crown of the world's

spiritual effort!) could have produced anything so vast, so imbecile, and so variously repulsive! The green miasma of a tank in the temple's centre, which is so pure that no outcaste or Muhammadan must come near it : the holy men, whose uncleanness would give a mandrill the jitters : the bathers and worshippers : the black cave where to be truly pious you must leave behind a parrot imprisoned for life! And the beggars! Incredible that a mess which has swum up from man's most primitive levels should now be so firmly established in a modern nation's prestige that it will never be criticised except by missionaries (whose criticism is discounted as bigoted and impercipient) !

Robin was not surprised to learn, from the paper he bought in Madras station, of the fate that had just overtaken a small group of Madura reformers. They were students who had held a meeting to start a movement for stopping in the main streets what is euphemistically called the creation of nuisances. Resident Conservatives, stirred by such heresy, had stoned the reformers and broken up their meeting. Madura stands where

Madura has always stood.

There is one good thing, however, in Madura, in the temple's entrance. Amid the wilderness of tawdry sculpture are three figures perfect in roguery ; the artist who made them was an artist indeed. They are the Three Great Gods all bending their wickedness engagingly towards a stoutish woman, by any but religious standards unappetising in the extreme.

Robin's guide noted his interest, and explained. ' Master, see how the Three Great Gods once upon a time wished to do that leddy some mischief. They all come to make her have child—child of theirs. Brahma beats tumtum, Siva he begs, Vishnu he is dancing.'

Very vividly and vivaciously they did it. Brahma was the perfection of low-class stolid vigour : a stout carle beating a drum, with the firm large curves of his body all assisting. Siva was the perfection of cunning solicitation. Vishnu danced as one would expect him to dance, if Vishnu decided to dance.

' But this girl she pure and she refuse. And she turn them all into little children.' The speaker brooded over this manifestation of

the strength of Chastity. 'Very powerful girl, that leddy ! She turn them all into little children ! So they know better next time !'

This question of children, and of ever more children, seems to be interesting our race as never before. Robin's guide was insatiable on the point. He asked about aphrodisiacs, and lamented the uselessness of doctors and drugs. Most of all, he asked if Master knew anything of Sri Aurobindo Ghose's *asram* at Pondicherry, where the former Nationalist and his disciples are meditating to bring down a higher form of humanity on this earth. Master did know something about it, but decided to keep the knowledge to himself. However, he understood when he was asked, 'Do you get any good—especially *children* ?'

'Some people perhaps go there for that reason.'

The guide thought this over, and when they parted said impulsively, 'I have decided to make a vow—*now* ! If successful, will go to Pondicherry next August and pay money to Saint.' Which was fair as well as thrifty. Why pay money to a Saint until he has delivered the goods ?

It may safely be said of certain ages that God never meant an idealist to live in them. If one does stray into them, it is because there has been some slip or misunderstanding in the work of the Angel who calls out the waiting souls for their incarnations. He has given a wrong summons.

2

‘Yet we can endure,’ Robin wrote home, ‘if we will only lift our eyes from what is nearest us. There was a time when we British were oh, so happy ! when first we heard of “Main Street” and gangsters, and when Mencken was issuing those jolly *Americana*. (Though even then suspicion hinted that in fertile places a rich *Flora Anglicana* was wildly blossoming, all ready to be culled and en-
vased.) *Mother India* sent a pleasant thrill of horror and superiority through once Indo-
phile America, and the almost pleasanter thrill of justification in British Imperialist circles, which were able to sit back and murmur, “We told you so ! But you wouldn’t believe us ! Now you *know* !”

‘ If *Mother India* were published to-day, it would stir hardly a ripple, we have had our noses held so close to our own cesspits ! ’

He wondered if the Rio Tinto mines were safe.

CHAPTER III

HE often ran into Calcutta for a day or two. In old days this would have been an episode ; now it was an affliction. He saw nothing but disease and misery and squalor. The glamour of the East had died ; its romance was a mockery ; and man an animal without dignity.

In the morning, long before light was even a smudged-in finger, began the row which has been called ‘ India’s Morning Hymn ’ (and also—‘ Ceylon’s National Anthem ’). Serviceable India was spitting and hawking its accompaniment to the preparation of Master’s breakfast. And throughout the hours of the day, on any thoroughfare—wherever the eye glanced—at any moment, of any hour—someone was ejecting from this House of Nine Doors some superfluity or other. In old days, at Vishnugram, he had taken a broad-minded view of this habit ; it was a

dry irritating climate, the sun would swiftly parch up any offence, or if the sun failed in his duty the rains would wash it majestically away. Yes, but now ?

It was part of his unhappiness that he knew also how Indians saw his own people.

He was at that point of soul-sickness (it has come to many, and to Indians not less than to us) when he saw only the clogging mess in which he moved. He found no crumb of comfort in any supposed superiority in his own mind or his own people.

In old days he had *known*, of course, but he had not had leisure or desire to dwell on his knowledge. Work had absorbed him, and the eagerness of students (not yet turned into sagging unhealthy bodies bent over desks) had taken fire from his own keenness. At the day's end he had taken a stick and mixed in hockey mellays, or had cycled into the jungle depths and there dismounted in the silence to watch the whiteness of sunset gathering. Something had been present always, to cleanse his vision or clear his mind. Now there was nothing.

More and more, all things were fading out

into *maya*, illusion. No, into worse than *maya*, for *maya* is peace. They were dropping into some abyss of black nightmare. His faith and the enthusiasms by which he had lived had little validity outside his own sheltered mind and heart.

I call them sheltered, and he called them that to himself. But in what sense were they sheltered ? Not from sorrow or sense of failure and homelessness. But sheltered from the sordid indignity of life as it is lived by the overwhelming majority of men and women. He was of the minority who went to church and took seriously literature and ideals and political theory and practice. How small that minority has always been, and how much of comfort and security it requires to exist at all, we know, now that it is shrinking out of existence !

And suddenly, by the malicious skill of the daemon who rules terrestrial affairs and from time to time exerts himself to prove once more that there is no dramatist worthy of the name beside him, on this bewildered world burst the Throne Crisis. If anyone had ever fooled himself before that he had a share in his

own government and knew the broad outlines of what was happening, he could fool himself no longer. In a week the whole post-War legend had had a sponge drawn over it; the King who had been for twenty years extolled as the greatest, noblest, bravest Prince and Ruler that the country had ever known was sent out, as his chief servant felicitously put it, into the darkness beyond its shores.

He had made his final speech, and it had come, mysteriously, movingly, to India in the deadest hour of night. Now at last (he had told his people), he could say something out of his own volition. He said it; and the effect was to remain. He spoke; and in deep shadow put off from his land into exile.

Being in Calcutta, Robin knew something of that effect, not only in his own soul but in the souls of India's inhabitants. In Eurasian circles, all night long there was a sound of weeping heard and loud lament. Women employed in hairdressers' establishments cut their work, for they could not face it. A Brahmo Girls' School broke into sobbing that continued for many hours, unabated.

In a mood of idle listlessness Robin

attended a cinema. It showed pictures of the just-resigned King ; by bad staff work, his title had not been changed. When his figure appeared, and the voice boomed out ' His Majesty,' the whole audience of Bengalis burst into hysterical laughter. The incident gave the Englishman something to think about ; nor was disquiet dissipated by a discussion by his own people, which he overheard in a hotel on Chowringhee, where opinion showed itself as sound. A major pointed out that King Edward had always dodged the religious note when he had made a speech ; it was agreed that it was right that he should be got rid of, for he did not go to church. It was irrelevant that the speakers also never went to church ; they were not in a position where they were fed and paid to go to church and to set an example. ' He is good riddance,' said a decided and efficient young woman. ' And we've got a lovely little Queen and nice good King.'

Which was true—but beside the point.

The Indian Princes, whose loyalty is such a comforting thought, did their own thinking and made the correct responses. Threatened

men whose minds are awake do not make mistakes. And the ordinary people, for perhaps the only time since the Great War ended, roused themselves for a very considerable bout of thinking ; it was not only Princes and statesmen that found the brain stirring and puzzled. The thinking lasted for some time, and its results will spring to life before this generation passes to its graves.

He had to go, Robin reluctantly admitted to himself. But this going had been no ordinary going. A legend had been shattered, and must be made afresh.

CHAPTER IV

OLD students had the knack of finding out when he was in the capital, and sought him out. He felt at such times that his days had gone by not altogether like water poured into a sieve set on sand.

Think for a moment, members of an imperial race whose prowess and service are so far-flung, of what it means to belong to a race that is inferior, so that even the best efforts of its best members remain provincial and trivial and unworthy of anyone's recording. Alden had spent over a quarter of a century teaching what were nominally students of undergraduate status; and of these the vast majority after graduation became petty clerks—if they had the luck to obtain employment at all. Most of educated Bengal was unemployed; and swiftly followed that fate's fulfilment. They became unemployable. In a large village might sit idle anything from a

score upwards of Calcutta graduates. Marrying, of course. Having children, of course. But starving.

He knew he had enough of these to lament. Knew also that the rewards of the teacher in England or Scotland did not come the way of the teacher in a subject country. The school-master in independent lands has the trust and love of men who have far outsoared him in importance or prominence. He can point proudly (the master in a great public school or the tutor in a University) to this and that old pupil who now makes a difference to the happiness of millions. They remember him, and his essential service at the turning-point of their lives.

What memory can you expect to keep in the obscure railway clerk at some up-country station? Or the dull mechanic drudge in some jute-merchant's office? Life drives them down, and makes them automata.

Yet in these did live some memory of the impetuous alien whose vigour and strength of will had once for a few brief years fooled them also into the delusion that they mattered, and had a future. Alden continually, and in the

most unexpected places, found himself face to face with remembrance and with gratitude. 'Sir, you do not remember me? Sir, I am petty-charges clerk in this railway station. Sir, you must let me get tea for my old master! The train has to wait ten minutes by schedule, and it is always many minutes more than that. I must get you tea and some biscuits. And there is Deben Babu, who was also your old pupil and who used to play cricket for College and whom you loved very much. He is clerk in our goods department, and he will surely come if he once hears that Reverend Alden is here.'

Here and there he came on some old student whose path had led to prosperity. There was Ramnath, who had become the trusted chemical analyst of a British firm which dealt in oils and paints. The boy had been eager and upright, one of a family whose members it had been a delight to teach—*Aryan*, as the word means, that is, *noble*. His firm had quickly learnt his value, and had sent him to London for three years' training in modern methods. He had been making discoveries, and would have liked to publish

them. This his employers forbade, for the discoveries had trade importance. But they made the loss up to him in other ways.

Ramnath, after he had been only a month in London, had called to see Alden in Cambridge. That month had unsteadied him, as the first month in Europe or America always unsteadies an Indian. Our civilisation, which at a distance has seemed both so powerful and efficient and so brutal and selfish, close at hand bewilders by its weakness and squalor and also its gentleness. At first Ramnath had seen only our preposterous popular papers and screaming placards ; our loud open mouth of vulgarity and ignorance had confronted him. He had been amazed at men who begged in the streets, from him—an Indian boy in their imperial land !

Alden had let him clear his troubled mind, and had understood. Then had come a time of strengthening and release (it does *not* come to all). In the end he had gone back to Bengal passionately convinced that the bitterness of his own countrymen, and their conviction that nothing is to be hoped for from the British except that enough of them may be

assassinated to shake their complacency, were mistaken and unjust. ' I have seen your people, and at first I was—oh, *so* unhappy ! But now I am glad I have seen them. For I know that they are good people, though not as I used to think. But why will they not understand *my* people, sir ? '

Here, back in Calcutta, master and pupil talked quietly. Neither needed to have reservations from the other. Almost Alden's first Indian memory was a sorrow which Ramnath, then a child, remembered also. Hirendranath, Ramnath's eldest brother, had fallen ill in the vacation, and Douglas had visited him. No student of his ever fell ill without Douglas learning this and seeking him out. Douglas, the College Principal whose manner was bruited in the Calcutta Press as so hard and misunderstanding, was seen far otherwise in his own place, which was all that mattered. When Hirendranath died, his father had known where to come for sympathy.

It is in an Eastern book that an Eastern judge reminds those whose eternal audit is being made, ' I was sick and ye visited me.'

That is nothing—nothing at all—in our efficient hurrying West. But in the East it is everything, for in the East the family is everything. Ramnath's family remembered, and would remember even if the British were driven from the land in a storm of hate and anguish. Alden's mind held the picture of a white-headed Indian weeping outside College House, and of Douglas with him, understanding everything, and understanding most of all that the boy who yesterday was carried to the burning-ghat had been kind and patient and selfless.

Ramnath now, the trusted and successful young scientist, was troubled for his unemployed fellows. He and Alden thrashed out possibilities of finding a way to give them again a life that would be life. They all seemed to lead back into despair and helplessness.

Always in Bengal, at the background of thought, is the memory of 'terrorism.' In the life of the province is a core of desperation, of wretchedness warped into insanity. If the effect of terrorism were ever frankly analysed and traced out into all its ramifications, in

British and Indian society, there would be something that might make even complacency think. It does not make it think in India, but it does make it eternally uneasy.

Alden asked, 'I suppose *every* student at heart admires the terrorists ?'

'Yes, sir. All. That is, practically all. They know it is wrong, of course.' (He conceded this.) 'But they think it very brave and self-sacrificing.'

'I know that,' said Alden. Still, he had asked to make sure.

Whenever another murder comes, there follow the usual comments from highly placed Authority in India and England. Terrorism, we are assured, is a vileness whose vileness is recognised—and is loathed utterly by Indian opinion. Only a tiny, an infinitesimally tiny, fraction of the people of Bengal support the wicked group who keep it alive. The people as a whole are soundly ethical on this point ; in fact, the thought of terrorism makes them almost physically sick.

All very comforting ; and if that is the kind of thing you like to believe, you will find it the kind of thing you like to believe.

‘ But, Alden,’ said another Indian friend, one westernised in all his ethics, if any man could be—a distinguished graduate of Oxford, a theist, a moderate in politics—‘ say what you like (and I admit that terrorism is without any defence), it is a *new* kind of Bengali that you are now seeing ! You can condemn them as much as you like, but those fellows who rushed the Chittagong jail and shot down the police and took their weapons, you have to admit that they were brave ! It isn’t the Bengali that Macaulay talked about that you are seeing now ! You cannot any longer say that Bengalis are cowards ! ’

Men in misery will find their own comfort, and this man was finding his.

There were others who could find none. Alden looked up another friend, also a Brahmo ; a writer who could write and had something to say, besides the stock sentimentalities.

The old man stared at him, and his eyes opened wide. ‘ Why, you are Alden Saheb ! I heard you had left us for good ! ’

Robin asked about his work.

‘ I am doing *none* ! What is the use ? I do

not wish to do work any longer. The old times were better.'

Then he launched out without warning, passionately, wildly, into a monologue whose heart of feeling was complex. Part of it no Englishman would understand, in its sorrowful depth. We are a disinherited race. Only a small proportion of us own even an inch of the country of which we are so proud ; we endure on its surface by sufferance of others. But to an Indian it is shame and ruin to be without a *bari*, a home. Alden had sometimes, when pressed to lend money, discovered that the borrower possessed a house, in some part of Bengal which he could practically never visit ; and he had suggested that it would be better to sell this house and thereby keep out of debt. 'What ! sell my *bari*? Oh no, sir, it would be wrong to do that !'

The *bari* in which Loken Babu lived was a very famous *bari*, for his family was a very famous family. Here generations of his ancestors had lived, in a vast four-square house with unending rooms and corridors, looking out on a completely enclosed green

space in their midst, with tall palms and a tank. What had happened? Marwaris—that everywhere intrusive merchant race from Rajputana, who are alleged to be able to ‘live on the smell of an oil rag’—had watched their chance, and had bought up bit by bit all but one side, which Loken and his brother still precariously inhabited.

As the old man stood with Alden, looking out on the green space now his no longer, Alden in his bones felt with his bones, and knew what it was like to feel that your family, your own life and the intensely lived communal life which had come down to you, was dying out from these walls even before your own body died. We in the West are individuals and walk our individual separate ways to the grave. The East is part of a sept, and its vitality, which so often towers up unexpectedly out of what *looked* to be utter weakness, is a vitality greater than the individual. It is terrible to be dying as a tradition and civilisation, as well as in your own person. From that death there can be no resurrection.

And the old man, looking out there, said

passionately, 'How has everything changed ! In the old days—when I was a child playing by those palms—if a red *pagri*—a police wallah—came in here, everyone looked on him as a friend and the children all came up to talk with him. But if now a red *pagri* appears' (he illustrated his words with sweeping vivid gestures), 'then in that corner, in this corner, we all look out and we say, "Hullo ! something is the matter ! The police have found out something which we did not know and there is going to be—oh, terrible trouble for all of us ! Perhaps we can bribe them, but then they are so greedy !" And everyone runs and hides ! Because we are all afraid. Because the whole province, because all our people, are full of fear. But I have come to see this,' he concluded with daemonic energy, 'it is no use *my* troubling myself as I have been doing—oh, these many years ! The world is *not* going to go *my* way ! It is not going to go yours !'

'I am quite sure of that,' said Robin.

'It is not going to go *our* way ! But it will go its own ! And sometimes I think that perhaps, long after you and I are both dead,

there may be some survival of the old which we did not expect, and for which we should be glad if we could see it. Look ! ' he said suddenly, pointing to stars very bright on the roof opposite, thrust up like flowers on a darkish stalk. ' Do you know what that is ? '

' No.'

' It is electric light. It has been put specially there, on an extension, for this month.'

' What is the idea ? '

Again the expressive eyes expanded to their widest. ' It is the *pitris* ! The ancestors ! This is the month of Kartik, when ancestors should be worshipped. And it is the dark fortnight, when there is no light. So we ought to put out light for them, because the *pitris* like light and we should worship them with light. So those Marwaris have put in an electric extension ! Because even Marwaris have *pitris*, and sometimes remember that this world is not all buying and selling.'

Robin had found a thought to stay his mind with ; and often and often, in the weeks which followed, he reminded himself, ' The world is not going to go *your way* ! '

CHAPTER V

I

THE weeks ran their course, watched through a mist. For the last time he drove his mind unpityingly through hundreds of term-end papers, correcting them.

‘The Collegiate School’s were the worst,’ he told his wife. ‘Figure to yourself how the brain reeled after reading sixty-five trans-mogrifications of Henry the Fourth’s Observations on Sleep! As to the Scripture papers, since I had myself taken the top two classes, we had some remarkable results. The trouble was, the examinees kept mixing up *my* remarks and Our Lord’s. The amalgam could be something fearsome.’

Some ass among the masters (anxious to catch the fresh-running current of loyalty to King’s Edward’s successor) had set for an essay, ‘New King-Emperor and Gracious Consort.’

One beauty had been gripped by a phrase, with which he had scourged himself on and on and up and up—‘ God Bless Our Royal Cupple ’ :

God Bless our Royal cupple. God bless our royal Cupple. All Indian hearts say god Bless Our royal cuple. Our royal Cupple should no dout vist India. God bles our Royal Cupple. All indian Herts much Glad to bless our God bless our Royal cupple. God bless our Royal cupple. God Bless our royal Cupple. god bless our royal cupple.

This occupied five sheets, loosely and indeed spaciouly written, with lordly disposal of paper. At the beginning were in Bengali the common invocations to various deities, and in English, ‘ May God help this poor student ! ’

At the end came a prayer to a lesser deity. ‘ Oh sir, show mercy to this poor student ! ’ After that, as an after-thought occurred once more, ‘ God bless Our royal Cupple ! ’

Nor was the phrase’s potency, in this author’s opinion, even then exhausted ! Alden accidentally flicked over three blank pages, to find it mysteriously staring out at

him again, the solitary sentence on an otherwise blank page. 'God Bless our royal Cupple.'

Out of curiosity he counted the blessings, and found they came to a hundred and eight in all. Ah, yes, of course ! A complete Vaishnava rosary ! Radha Krishna, Krishna Radha. Our Royal Cupple.

So much for the 'loyalty' which through so many decades an official system of education had strenuously inculcated on a subject race. It ended in a phrase which an unhappy half-wit juggled and tossed over several pages, varying his capital letters and trying to see if he could plump out a whole essay with it.

Yet this was far the most refreshing essay of the lot. As for the rest, he commented : 'How little the heathen change ! They are always firmly of belief that they will be heard for their much speaking. I recall the cheerfully daft question I used to slip into the papers I set in happier times. "If you get five marks for writing five pages of nonsense, how many marks will you get for writing twenty pages of nonsense ?" And the answer

was—invariably—“ Twenty marks.” Indians are good at mathematics, and this had been an easy one ! Yet I’m wretched at leaving this land and this people for ever,’ he told Frances remorsefully. ‘ And if anything I write now seems discouraged, put it down to the end of a chapter that has been heavy going. It’s merely physical tiredness ! just the result of long-drawn-out exasperation, and a pile of examination papers about seven feet thick ! The man who’s been breaking stones in a hot sun isn’t the best judge of the aesthetic quality of the rock or of what a polish it may be capable of under other treatment ! But he may notice these things, all the same ; and remember them afterwards ! ’

2

The last fortnight began with a deputation from the students of his own hostel, the Halifax Hostel. They drew his attention to a fast which Gandhi was undergoing, and announced that as a protest against the evil course which Government was pursuing and a mark of sympathy with Mahatmajee, they

intended to undergo their own fast, of a week's duration. Alden agreed readily, even warmly. Most people ate too much : medical opinion held occasional fasting beneficial : religious teachers inculcated it. The money the Hostel would save could be given to the Vishnugram weavers, who were passing through a grim time of under-employment.

The fasters, exchanging looks of not too great contentment, accepted the arrangement. ' It is a *good* arrangement,' he said to himself, and went on with his correspondence.

' The Halifacians accordingly retired more or less into purdah, and I gave the cooks a holiday. When the week of mourning ended, however, my office was invaded by an irate Pathan, bearing a huge bill for sweets and cakes alleged to have been supplied to the fasters. The incident brightened a grisly day ; and as a voluntary thankoffering I have made a personal contribution to the financial settlement, which was reached after gusts of denial and recrimination. The gaff side of Indian politics has kept me sane, and even happy ! '

3

The last day arrived. In his honour the College staged a play. One he knew (too well), all about the wars of Rajputs and Moslems. There was a tremendous deal of exceedingly noisy plotting, when swords were brandished and voices declaimed as their owners sat in secret conclave. Finally, a cruel usurper murdered a baby, the child of the faithful nurse, who substituted it for her charge.

The usurper prowled about ; he could not see the baby in its cradle, though baby and cradle together constituted the whole furniture of the room and lay in the exact middle of the floor.

‘ Pan-na ! ’ (the nurse’s name). ‘ *Rajchhele kothai ?* ’ (‘ Where is the royal child ? ’)

Panna did not think it up to her to tell him.

Presently he discovered the child, and plunged his sword deep in its breast, churning as if he were stirring the Christmas pudding.

The audience rose to this moving scene. ‘ Very nice ! Capi-tal ! ’ A student leapt to his feet, and his voice rang out. ‘ I give a medal !

For nice acting !' 'And I give another !'
'And I give a third !' 'And I give a fourth !'

A week later the Rev. Robert Alden presided over a meeting where these medals were awarded by Mrs. McCormick.

And again (thought Robin), the student of political affairs is entitled to ask, By what right do British diehards deny that India is as yet fitted to understand democratic government ? She understands it very well indeed. Before him were breasts as proudly be-medalled as if they belonged to a row of generals. They had been collected by nice football (no one in Bengal thinks anything of a Cup competition which does not award also to each member of the winning team a medal), by nice acting, even by nice examination passing.

This was his farewell. Then he was free, if that can be called freedom which is the ending of a man's life-work. There lay ahead only the elections, and his work on the Commission, which was due to land in the first week of January.

CHAPTER VI

I

MEANWHILE he awaited a sign. So he wandered widely through Native India, since he knew it least.

Interspersed with Native India, in pockets of British India he saw, as by flashes fading out into utter darkness, signs of the new perplexing India, neither spiritual nor ethical and not mystic at all.

There was the Jain millionaire who was so fussed lest a beast be killed anywhere for food, and so little fussed about possessing the most abominable factories in the whole country. How little of a Jain he was he revealed when speaking of Nehru's campaign for Socialism. 'If you are going to put hands on my property,' he shouted, 'my hands are going to be on your throat, my friend ! I supported my people in the Round Table Conference. But if the Conference came again

to-morrow, I tell you I would not go even as far as I went then, in support of self-government !’

His son and daughter listened with smiles of contemptuous tolerance ; and invited the Englishman to an evening meal, from which the father was absent. The daughter was exquisitely sari’d. Her finger nails were a long tapering scarlet, as red as her lips. Every movement was elaborately languid. The meal was luxurious, and served by menials humble even for India.

And of course politics blew up, as they always blow up in India to-day. The boy showed his savage hatred ; he and his sister were infuriatedly pro-Congress, pro-terrorist. A worshipper of Gandhi, the girl with insolent gesture of her jewelled hand showed Alden a locket round her neck.

‘ But they knew which side their bread was buttered, right enough ! They *knew*, as all India knows, what sort of demons run their mills and shops ! Gandhi or no Gandhi, they mean to have no interference here ! I listened in amazement, that they could *talk* to me of their support of Socialism, and could not see,

or would not see, the implications it would have on this filthy life of theirs ! That they seemed to think the scented cigarettes, the gilded cups and gilded everything, would not whisk out of the window if men and women and children ceased to slave for them, and if the British administration ceased to keep a ring of bayonets round their precious persons !

‘ I begin to see why our own younger writers feel so implacably that every decent writer must stop bothering about art or imagination, and that before it is too late everyone that *can* speak, in *any* fashion, *must* speak, and with a brutality of frankness which artists never used before ! The whole world has got beyond homoeopathic methods, or Liberalism, or art for art’s sake, or sermons about considering the lilies ! The lilies had better be forgotten by us, and left to the next generation ! *They* can consider them all they want. *I* can’t !

‘ But I kept my tongue—the last and hardest thing that I have learnt in India ! (Oh, yes, I *can* keep it—if I see a reason !). And I kept my temper, and kept the faith !

I remembered other Indians, friends of mine. I remembered Mahatmajee, whose name these pampered darlings took so impudently and whose picture one of them wore set round with gems ! I saw that amazing little gnome telling those who came to him charged with passion and violence to go and nurse for a month the foulest diseases they could find, and *then* come back to him ! Men and women have done it, and *keep on doing it*. And it changes them, as he foresaw it would !

‘ Anyway, there *is* another India, besides this hard-boiled dishonest one, and besides the sycophantic one we know so well ! So I vowed to have done with British India for a while,’ he concluded.

2

He was surprised afterwards by the monotony of memory that accrued. Towering forts and palaces, to every palace a new wing built by the newest Raja, and built so badly ! and inside, so dreadfully adorned ! India’s artistic standards had given place to

those which rule the English public-house. The same prints, of a conventionally sporting countryside, alternating with heads of creatures which had once moved in life through the woods and fields ! there seemed little difference between His Highness's home and the parlour of ' The Red Lion ' or ' The Fox and Hounds.' ' Oh yes, there was a difference of sorts ! samples of Indian Art, in the kinds it loves—pictures of Krishna, complete with lotuses, looking at a Cow ! And as another variant, if variant is the word for what was sheer monotonous imbecility, everywhere seems to have peregrinated a deadly painter fellow, who for each Nawab and Maharaja in turn has daubed vast florid masterpieces, representing episodes from the heroic age of his employer's ancestors ! '

Adolescence is the impression which the outside world gathers from the face which India's rulers present, whether British or Native ; adolescence queerly runs through all their systems. It was adolescence that Alden saw and felt—in an India pulsating with a thousand streams of new life drawn from many lands, from Japan to America. Adol-

escence in the decorations at which he stood aghast, at their very side seeing the genuineness of beauty which was Ancient India : in the noise of the hired panegyrists shouting all day long and all night long their Raja's praises, and all this in a room within deafening distance of that in which his Highness administered his subjects : in the absurd publications pressed on every passing Westerner, that collected together *chits* from this and that patronising official (as if his Highness were after a job !) and stressed his inherited *izzat* as well as the prestige acquired by his own achievements !

And outside the palace always the same sights : the leg-chained mangy bored elephant idly plucking at dirty straw ; and inside the palace always the same sights : vast chandeliers and freak mirrors round the walls, to amuse his Highness in the way a Highness chooses to be amused through his mind.

Yet the palaces witnessed to a life that was mightier and vaster than the individual whose prowess those musicians were bellowing out. Each was a coral reef into which a score of generations had put their bones. One after

one, each had added its cell, and vanished.

He found himself, despite himself, drawing ever closer to a dim vision that was India, and not conventional India at all, but an India which had endured and known thought and feeling, whose spiritual values were not all bogus.

3

He came to a famous city in the desert, where on palace walls were small white hands of marble affixed. Here each faithful wife of its Kings had set her palm when she went out to her fiery death. Very small, very fragile, they seemed ; as if out of the Past there came an appeal which was not all for the pity of saner happier generations, but held in it pride that stood aloof from our judgment.

He had been moved for years by the story of the bravest and loveliest of all these children who had died : a Princess who had gone to her doom in the year of Navarino. Sir John Malcolm, that meddlesome Scot, had been persuading these pinchbeck kings that their corpses could burn with quite

adequate pomp by themselves, without the hallowing of their obsequies by human agony. Family and attendants had consented that she might go on living. To frighten her (said tradition) they had brought for her (the *sati* rides to her death) the fiercest of her lord's horses, which even his most practised trooper dared not back. But her spirit was of the antique world, and its thoughts reached back into shadows where Queens of Ur of the Chaldees had died beside their lords. Amid those shadows she had lived, and by their ordainment she must die.

She had set her face, and ridden out. At touch of the *sati*'s hand the horse had quieted, and in utter stillness and obedience had borne her to the pyre, through the crowd's ecstatic worship, the conchs and horns and drums. The brute soul had known the presence of a divine one.

They had made her a goddess since, and to her shrine at the royal burning-ground, five miles away, Alden walked in the dawning. The path lay over the ridge of the earth's backbone, and he could see widely to all directions. The long dry landscape, studded

with bushes of zizyph and *krin*—the thorn that flings out a shower of tentacles, naked except where pricked with tiny scarlet flowers that are like drops of congealed blood—was utterly silent. ‘There is *nothing*, nothing in all life,’ the Englishman told himself, ‘that is divine, except the courage and self-forgetfulness of man and woman.’ He walked on, awed and shaken with love and pity for the dead who had passed this way before him. In his own spirit he lived over again her thoughts as she looked out on the world which now she was seeing for the first time : the land which she had idealised, shut inside the seclusion that imprisons a Rajput lady from birth : now at last opened to her gaze as she moved towards eternity !

Yet at the shrine itself he could learn nothing from the fool who kept it. All that this man thought important was this and that Raja’s pomp and *izzat* : he harried the Englishman, plucking at his sleeve, and begging him to note how this Highness had had twenty *satis*, and that one, more important still, twenty-five. ‘*Bish sati !*’ *Khali dus sati !*’ (‘Twenty *satis* !’ ‘Only ten

satis!'). He cared less than nothing for the flower-like spirits flung down as incense ; all that mattered was the masculine which was adulated then and adulated now !

They were there, sculptured on the memorials, these ten *satis*, or twenty (or it might be, twenty-five) *satis*. To the pity of their fate the artist had been impervious ; his job was to set out eternally all the cruelty and indecency that can lurk in a nation's soul, and tremendously had he done it ! Eyes were wide open in staring terror ; bodies were squat and bulging, and those bulges waggled aside as in some prehistoric Broadway or West End ' smash-hit.' The shrine's guardian was very sure of the masculine grandeur to which the memorials witnessed, and stood there grinning, and murmuring his '*Bish sati ! dus sati !*' He took for awe and admiration the shame of the Englishman who stood in silence and turned away in revulsion.

They went with him, haunting in their loathsomeness, these visions of barbarity triumphant—absurdly skipping, grotesquely and servilely dancing, fawning and ministering to the lord for whom they died—woman

useless except to bear sons and to swing her hips and crack her fingers !

Queer that emancipated woman also seems everywhere willing to reel back to the odalisque stage ! No, she is not likely ever again to burn with her man. But if screen and stage and literature and the advertisements which beauty stuff purveyors force on our eyes in every paper mean anything, the odalisque is the secret ambition of many.

Not so had the girl looked, with whose spirit his spirit had moved in pilgrimage over the desolate heath ! Her spirit had escaped the sculptor, as in life it had escaped the savages with whom she lived and to whose arrogance she had been given in sacrifice !

CHAPTER VII

I

PERHAPS within his own spirit he was being guided to healing and peace, for a fortnight later he was at Buddh Gaya.

Day after day he had wandered through the park-like spaces of forest and hamlet where Gautama had served his seven years' time of vain self-torture. It was joy and restfulness to be there, and *alone*—as a spirit after some absence of dreaming trance or unconsciousness slipping back into the body. This was the wilderness in which he had found

A body for my needs, that so
I may not all unclothèd go,
A vital instrument whereby
I still may commune with the sky,
When death has loosed the plaited strands
And left me *feeling for the lands*.

He thought much of his own earlier years in India, and of Findlay, whose toils had

been so obscure and for people of such almost sub-human unimportance and whose life was nearing its end. Had any of it all been worth while? What did it signify? Had their whole choice of vocation been an error?

They had been caught up into the full tide of a great missionary age, when even statesmen thought that evangelism mattered. And it had not been mere adolescent excitement, or the jollity of being with other excited people. Not the worst, but some of the best brains of that generation had gone into religious effort.

That age had ended. Christian people were disorganised and disillusioned, or else maundering astray after movements which touched nothing that thinking men could care about. An Archbishop was sounding a Recall to Religion. Yes, but Alden had an idea that what the recaller meant by religion was something which he himself had no wish to be recalled to. An Oxford Grouper had sent him pamphlets, which assured him that the Group had 'solved the colour problem in South Africa.' Alden knew that the problem had been 'solved,' and how it had been

solved ! He believed in God too deeply to be willing to drag even his name into vapidness and slick assumptions. If these things were God in the new age, then—from very faith in the God he had known—he himself would stand aloof from God !

The men and women whom he had known had stood for something which had eternal values, and in the passion of their faith had kept back nothing. That faith, with all its flaws and blind spots, had run back in lineal connection to the life in Galilee and Christ's forsaken death. And how little of what is styled Christianity—of official Christianity—can by any power of imagination be thought to do that !

He found himself talking to the silence, and knew that he was being heard. ' Thou art *the Way* ! And if I had chosen the way for myself I should have lost it ! But now—though I do not know if anything that I have done, or that John has done, has been worth doing—I do know that I am glad we tried to do it ! '

I have said that he knew the silence was listening. He did know this ; it was a feeling that had come to him a hundred times, when

he was alone like this, and he accepted it while aware that to no other man or woman could he justify it as truth. He was in a world where mind flickered over all he saw or touched ; mind was ready to speak with the mind within himself,

The transitory being that beheld
This vision.

He was willing to believe that this experience also, of personal being and existence, was temporary and phenomenal solely, and that after this life this too might pass away. ‘ Behind God,’ he reminded himself, ‘ “ is the darkness of the Godhead, which no man has known or can know.” Even if there is no eternal life for me, I have *known life* that is *eternal*, moments that in their quality had nothing of the brief and fussy and swiftly passing. I have had my hour and been blessed ! ’

2

It was evening, and after sunset, when he reached Buddh Gaya, and was before the tree where enlightenment had dawned on Sakya Muni after his wasted years.

A monk came and lit three candles : left a few fragrant white flowers in earthenware saucers : bowed low to the shrine, and went his ways.

‘ All things are sorrow, Ascetics ; all things are decay and passing : this learnt I in my forest meditations by stream and thicket : this have I seen in my minglings with men and women, my brothers and sisters, bound with me in the one bond of patience and suffering and illusion protracted from day to day and from existence to existence.’

As he looked back over his thirty years in India, little forgotten incidents swam up into clearness. The first day of all, he had been met by Douglas, his Chief, in the pre-dawn chillness at the station. Freshness was in all he saw, and fanning him in the cold sweet air that blew up from the earth.

That day had ended with hockey, played with serene disregard of rules. At a particularly flagrant breach, Robin had shouted ‘ STICKS ! ’ Not the slightest notice had been taken ; the game swept majestically on. Yet five minutes later he had overheard one of his own side’s full-backs, a creature tremendous

in hugeness—who rushed at opponents like an avalanche, with one hand gathering up fold on fold of snowy billowing robes—murmur to himself disconsolately, ‘ Why was *not*—the matter of *Sticks*—taken into *con*—sideration ? ’ Why, indeed ? But in those days they were not pedantic.

How happy-making nearly all these memories were ! He remembered that charming lovely boy stricken with elephantiasis, and how wretched he himself had been on his account. Then he had watched him—to his amazement—actually pretending to play football, and in a deep rich voice chiding other players, less hampered than himself, yet in his judgment making a muss of chances. In the boy’s chuckling sense of humour, laughing at himself for daring to criticise while so little use, the Englishman had seen something that had made his own heart lighter and made it lighter now. For this one thing, though all else might be a wild dream of horror, God should always have his praise—because He had set such courage in the world !

Well, those days had gone and with them

had gone an India better tempered, less sophisticated, and still bemused with a belief in the white man's superiority and even his generosity and good intentions. In those days, when he had met an Indian on pony or cycle, the latter had scrupulously dismounted as in presence of his ruler, though Robin was only a missionary. Umbrellas had been put down until he had passed by. The Partition time angers had stirred but tiny ripples in Vishnugram, and even those angers at their worst had been of the nature of quick (though murderous) flarings up that subsided as swiftly as they arose.

It may be that about him clung yet some aura of his own days of youthful strength and decision, and affable unthinking acceptance of suzerainty. He was travelling in India now as a poor man, and had no servant. If he wanted to draw money or to buy stamps, he took his place in the queues. Invariably there would be a tremor of interest and even horror through the patient chain in front of him. Faces would look round, and there would be whisperings. Finally, by the urging of all he would take his place at their head.

Or was this merely Indian courtesy to the foreigner who demanded nothing, and whose mind was plainly *nishkam*, desireless ?

Within himself he grew ever more conscious of a withdrawal of strength and zest—

The thrift of our Great Mother, calling back
Her forces !

3

As he sat in the darkness, by that Buddh Gaya shrine, Alden passed out of the body. He was in Ancient India, watching the crowds, less miserable then than now, but by all that is pitiful wretched enough ! Once you have lived in India, surrounded by its malformed nightmare figures—where even the lovely river banks are littered with messy skulls and shanks half picked by vulture and jackal—, you understand that stress on physical foulness which the West finds so revolting in the Buddha's teaching ! ' To us it seems like a slap in the face to stress it, when to each and every one of us comes the inexorable knowledge that we are, as Yeats puts it, "chained to a dying animal." But to India it's the thing that conditions all exist-

ence, and *all thought* of existence—the thing that makes birth and rebirth nothing but evil—the thing that we well-fed, football- and polo-playing aliens haven't done half enough to banish ! God knows we've misery enough, in our own grim northern land. But anyway there's always *some* hope of escape. There's no caste doctrine to tell you you are fettered and manacled just where Fate has placed you, to stay put. There are the betting pools and the dogs and the Saturday football and *John Bull* bullets. Any one of these, with luck, may give you a way out.'

He saw in vision, as he had seen so often in daily life, the leper and the man who was aged and a burden to all who knew him. He saw faces scarred and mauled by disease, and bodies so twisted that it beggared credulity to think there can be any Creator Mind that would send souls into such a prison of pain and terror of appearance. There were poor and humble, and rich and arrogant, then as now. And to all the King's Son brought his message : that birth was suffering, life was suffering, all things were suffering : that all were in bonds, the rich and arrogant no

less than the poor and humble whom they despised : that for all was a Way of Salvation, the Middle Path, the Noble Fourfold Path.

Buddha had taught that this Way led only to extinction, to Nirvana, life's going out, as when a candle's flame is taken between thumb and finger and snuffed out. Or so the West, and most of the East, has believed. But had he in reality taught this ? And as to this whole question of immortality, does the man whose life is drawing to its close desire eternal existence, as the young man who has died in him desired it once ? Robin was not sure, was not sure at all. ' And if I do still desire it, it is not for the old reasons that once appealed to me. I remember how I used to argue that it was " incredible " that the men and women in whom our race has touched its highest should have gone out for ever. Milton, Dante, Emily Brontë, Joan of Arc—one could not conceive of these as *dead* !

God ! Thou art Mind, and to the master mind
Mind must be dear !—

especially mind such as this, and of this quality !

' But now I think I can, and easily, con-

ceive of all those as dead. I think that to such as these the Creator Spirit says, " You have been worked out, having poured out the whole of what you were and what you possessed. There remains nothing that could matter to anyone ! "

' But what about the countless obscure men and women I have known, whose lives have moved on quiet ordinary levels—yet they themselves have been, to everyone who knew them, so richly and strengtheningly real and *individual* ? It is these, in their very abundance, and not the few leaders of our kind, who are the argument that now appeals to me. Gandhi, anyone can see, has *lived* : he has found fulfilment, shaking the strongest Power the world has ever known and building up the weakest people it has ever known ! But John Findlay has been merely John Findlay—that is, something which God, unless God is a fool, must know he cannot afford to let pass out into annihilation, for God *has not yet used him to the uttermost* ! '

0 India, he thought to himself, made the mistake of millenniums, and shackled and ravaged herself for all future time, when she

rejected the Buddha and chose her other way.

4

The hours passed, and still he sat on in that silence. This was the very tree, or sprung from it, in whose shadow the world-changing battle had been fought out so long ago. Here had risen from his night of tumult that Ascetic of ascetics, and with spirit made whole at last had confronted the sunrise, and chanted his hymn of triumph and deliverance :

O master of this house, thou hast been seen !
Thou cunning hider, I have gripped thee fast !
And never shalt thou build again
This body fashioned out of ignorance and pain !

The sweetness of the white-flowering jasmines, the freshness of the winter air, the silence and stars of night—and the memory of that face set in eternal calm, as the world has learnt to know it since—made Robin Alden the Englishman happy that his lot had been cast in India. And it seemed to him as if he had been pleading humbly that he had a *right* to be here, in this silence and peace. ‘ I

have lost my old restlessness. Perhaps,' he thought, as he rose at last, 'the world has been wrong about us. We may have been wrong about ourselves, thinking of ourselves as so strong and so practical. Perhaps it is the Englishman who ends as the true *sannyasi*, having run through so many forms of action and learnt the vanity of them all. He has played and fought and ruled, and in the end it is a handful of ashes ! He has learnt to give up all.'

Was it from his own heart came a whisper in the darkness ? ' Go, then, true *sannyasi*, in peace ! '

CHAPTER VIII

THE Commission turned out to be good people: Jameson, head of a great Cambridge College, Handisyde the renowned theologian, Miss Sibyl Bates the woman's movement leader. 'Though why anyone should ever have wished me on to them beats me! A going against the flat command of Scripture: "Thou shalt not unequally yoke an ox and an ass together."' They knew an immense deal about India, from bluebooks and from other excellent books. They were utterly charming to him, and at parting Warden Jimmy said, "You have been—well, very stimulating, Mr. Alden. I am sure we have found your views very *original* and interesting and—and frank! I hope to see something of you when you return to Cambridge. Though of course I have to be very busy there!"

He saw to it that they had good berths

on the Calcutta-Bombay night express ; and settled down to hold the elections.

The Congress representative pointed out the importance of strictly fair allotment of the beasts of which drawings were to be set against the candidates' names. These were to assist the electors, most of whom were illiterate.

Alden looked over the works of art at his disposal, and suggested that his totem should be a snake.

The Muslim candidate objected. ' Snake is very holy in India. Snake would give unfair advantage.'

' You shall have the Cow,' Robin told the protestant.

' Cow,' the zemindars' candidate pointed out, ' is even more sacred than Snake. Cow can never be associated with Mussulman.'

Robin therefore drew the Congressman aside. He knew him, and knew that he was good-natured and sensible. He said, ' Of course I have to be neutral and all that, and to hold and express no opinions. But hang it all, I can't help knowing what everyone knows—that no one but the Congress can-

didate stands an earthly chance of election. You be a Snake and let him be a Cow. He needs all the help he can get, and it will bring him nowhere even then ! ’

The Congressman agreed, readily enough. Alden proceeded to allot other creatures to the other candidates. He let the zemindars’ candidate be an elephant ; it seemed somehow right.

The Congressman was duly elected. And his chief supporter, who happened to be also the principal cloth-merchant of the district, held festival in honour of victory. Round the town went a crier, ringing a bell and shouting that ‘ every wretched destitute one ’ presenting his or her person at an appointed time would receive a fistful of rice and four pice (one penny).

Robin, as Chief Election Officer, received his own separate notification. ‘ The Honour of your presence is solicited at 4.30 standard time, at Shibbari, where the Feeding of the Poor and other Amusements will take place. ’

He turned up to see these revels, and they were worth seeing. The Benefactor and his friends, having fed and drunk to repletion,

came out and lolled on large chairs on an uplifted veranda. Below them the compendious misery which only India can produce in such mass, variety and profusion clamoured and thrust out skinny hands. Leprosy and elephantiasis and ulcers jostled and shouted for two hours before the distribution was due. ‘*Dao ! dao !*’ (‘Give ! give !’)

Certainly India has been lucky. She has had close on two centuries of administration by the most enlightened and benevolent nation on earth, and millenniums of uplift dispensed by the most spiritual religion on earth. Yet her boundaries contain a seething wretchedness no other land can equal.

As he was going away from the surging mob still fighting for their handfuls of rice, a postman came up to Alden, salaamed, and gave him a letter. It was from Findlay. ‘Dear Rob,’ it read, ‘the sign has come.’

PART IV

BESIDE THE PHALGU RIVER

CHAPTER I

JOHN lay in the one decent room of the Sonachura bungalow. A fire was burning, and a grey-haired Goanese woman was tending him. Robin recognised the Pirate Chief's Staff. She rose as he entered, and went out silently.

The sick man's eyes were in high fever. They lit up as Robin came in, and John pressed his hand. Neither of them said anything for a few minutes. Then (Robin bent low, and caught the words, spoken with difficulty), 'I can't talk now. I shall be able to talk this evening. Leave me till then, Rob.'

From the self-appointed nurse he learnt that John had been called to a dying man, some miles away, in the night. On his return there had been a cloud-burst: the river had swollen, and for thirty hours he had been unable to return. From exposure and soaking

he had caught a chill, and after he had lain untended for some days word had reached Pilgrims' Paradise. The chill had passed into pneumonia.

Rob saw to it that there was a sufficiency of wood. The nurse and her brother had seen to it that there was food.

Just after sunset, MacNab and a coolie arrived, bringing more food.

MacNab looked at Findlay lying dozing. Knowledge of his sorrow seemed to awaken the sick man, who turned over and smiled, outstretching his hand. MacNab seized it, and kissed it, bursting into weeping. Then he went out, and Rob saw him making his slow way back, a heavy disconsolate figure, drooping his head as he walked.

John motioned to Rob that he wanted to talk, and Rob sat down.

' You can do nothing for me, Rob, except the one thing that matters most of all, stay with me till the end. There is no doctor in the world who could delay, or hasten, what is coming, and when it comes we shall both know in good time. Until then there is no need to think of it. Everything has been de-

terminated and fixed, and I have been given this time with you.'

'I made up my mind,' he went on presently, 'that I would not die until you came. I knew I could do this. For never, not even when I was young and strong, have I so felt master of this body that I have nearly done with. In the old days, flesh and soul seemed intertwined, so that one could not be pulled apart without hurting the other. But now—'

He paused, withdrawing into himself. Then he went on. 'I have been merely living inside my body—as I have lived inside this house,—and to everyone who came up I gave this answer: "I am not leaving till I have spoken with my friends."'

Robin half got up; he played with the fire, arranging new logs, pushing about the logs already there.

'It was touch and go yesterday. I almost thought I was going. But I found help. The messengers were sent back, and told that I was to stay till I had seen you. And now they have told me' (again, as on a former occasion, there was no need to ask who this 'they' were) 'that I can take it at my own

will—almost. I am not to be hurried. You need not be afraid that if you go out for an hour you will find me gone when you get back !’ He felt for Rob’s hand, and pressed it. ‘ We can talk, Rob. Not about my going, or about anything that is happening to me. But as we used to do, about anything that has come into your head or mine.’

Rob hesitating, John asked him, ‘ Tell me everything that you have done since you were here.’

‘ Oh, why should I bother you, John ? I told it all in my letters.’

‘ Never mind. Tell it again.’

Rob found himself pouring out his tale of absurdities, laughing at his own vexation. And he found his mind lightening, for the first time since this return to India ; they fell away as the trivialities which they were.

From Vishnugram to Madura : from Madura to Calcutta : the farce of the elections : the Feeding of the Poor and other Amusements : the Abdication of the King and those amusements.

‘ Do you remember, John, how just after the Great War broke out Government sent

round for a census of Scandinavians in India? I suppose the consuls of the Northern countries had asked for a return, and no doubt Government wanted to shepherd the good Norwegian and Swedish and Danish sheep apart from the wicked German goats. Headley told me some of the replies. One deputy magistrate answered firmly: "There is NO scandinavia in my district at present. But it is reported that there has been an outbreak in the Birbhum Division. I am issuing suitable orders that this scandinavia may not spread to my district." Another chap wrote: "It is reported that two Scandinavians came over the mountains last week and did much mischief to sugarcane crops. But the Police Superintendent has shot one of them, and the other has fled back into Nepal." "

After they had laughed at the recollection, Rob continued, 'Doesn't it strike you that the first fellow talked deeper sense than he ever realised? There is NO scandinavia in India, John! not a scrap of it—of decent sane common sense and moderation! Not that we have so very much in England! As the last

week has shown, and in the open gaze of the whole astonished world ! And *I* don't see any such vast difference between always hitling and heiling, lifting hands at every thought or mention of Duce or Führer, and our own incessant God-save-the-King-ing ! However,' said Alden, as he poked again at the fire and stared hard and long into its glowing depths, ' something has happened now, though this generation will never know exactly what ! '

' John,' he said presently, ' there are times when I find myself in sympathy with the merriest maddest diehard of them all ! I've reached the stage foretold for all flesh ; the grasshopper has become a burden. I look on men in the mass, and see them walking—as *canaille* ! They are fit only to be bossed ! And so ends the democratic dream ! It's been a long-drawn-out dream, but it's finished at last ! And my own dream has scattered with it.'

' Well, perhaps it has,' John agreed. ' But a dream is meant only for the period while the body is asleep. And up here in my hills and forest quietness I have seen many dreams scattering, Rob—as in the mornings I have

seen the mists scattering. And I have known the world was waking.'

'Yes, but suppose it isn't going to be anything you find pleasant when it *has* wakened ! Nothing but the hot blasting glare of summer, that hasn't in its eyes a single wink where any thought of beauty or gentleness could hide ! But tell me about the dreams you have watched breaking up and vanishing—in these hills of yours, John !'

'I suppose the main dream is that which you and I cherished when we came to India. We thought of a calm, steady process which would make India Christian and England understanding and pitiful, and both of them wise and great.'

'Quite. A widening of the bounds of peace, beginning with an Empire which was at rest within itself and a source of confidence to every other decent-purposed nation ! and, last of all, the whole world awake to its common humanity, and all nations at peace at last ! Each following meekly our Westminster model and precedent, and Great Britain leading them all into the Millennium ! That was the dream of mid-Victorian Liberalism ! No,

it was the dream of ordinary mid-Victorian complacency ! It was the Tory poet Tennyson who held it most strongly and expressed it most plainly !

‘Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the
battle-flags were furled
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the
world !’

‘Well,’ said John, ‘it looked for a while as if it *might* happen—with Dumas and Reichstags and Assemblies springing up everywhere !’

‘Yes. But we know now that it isn’t going to happen ! And not only that dream, but the special post-War variant of it has gone—for ever ! We planned to make the rights of small nations safe. And for a time—for a time,’ said Rob wearily, ‘the small nations had their chance. They could even be as quarrelsome and waspish as a lot of spitting kittens—because the big cats’ claws had been cut. The ten years after the War will always be remembered as the period when oppressed nationalities had the time of their lives. That time has gone and their only choice is which of them is going to be eaten last, and

even that choice isn't theirs ! But what I'm troubled about, John, is that part of the whole world's dream which fell to your lot and mine. What troubles me most of all is that whole nations, and among them the greatest, have shaken Christianity from them in our own day. For I can't help feeling that it isn't merely governmental action, and ruthlessness of Nazi or Soviet bosses, that is responsible for all this turning away from the dream by which Western nations have lived, but that there are in the world to-day nations which have found something lacking in Christianity. It *doesn't* appeal to them, it *doesn't* cover the whole of life for them ! '

' No. It doesn't,' John admitted. ' You are putting a finger on the heart of the world's malady, Rob. I have been outside everything that has been happening, and it is pikestaff-plain that for a great while past the thinking of Christians has not been up to its job. It's the head that has gone wrong, and not the heart. The heart's sound enough ! '

Rob reflected on this. He nodded agreement. ' Yes, they've lost mental grip, compared with when we were young. The stuff

that pours in on me, from men who slide off sideways into edificatory or exclamatory nonsense ! mere noisy assurance that "in Christ" lies the whole solution of every economic or social or any other trouble ! They no longer come to close quarters with the terror and weakness in man's own mind. Is there no way out, John ? '

' Yes. There will have to be found a way out, Rob. And it will have to be found by the mind. There are times,' said the dying man, ' when evangelism—or exhortation and edification—is all the age needs. But we live when it needs to be shaken back to its intellectual bases, and in Christianity most of all ! If religious people are wise they'll concentrate on proving the Love of God *credible*, in a world such as we know it is, and by insisting on an overhauling of their whole Christian system ! Their minds have slept too long ! '

' But you and I, John,' said Rob despairingly, ' matter nothing, and can do nothing. We are only two obscure men, whose roots in their own land are now held by hardly a fibre and whose place in this other land which

they have tried to serve is uncertain and passing. Striving to save our own souls and our comrades' homeward way, we seem to have lost the thread of our own way. At least, I have ! I have tried to get at grips with the ghosts in my own mind, and to rebuild in the foggy fifties the faith by which I walked so confidently in the twenties.'

He added, after a period while both men were silent, ' And it isn't only that India bores *us*. It now bores Indians themselves. Heaps of them are dead sick of their country and its problems. As sick as ever we are ! '

' Yes, that's true. And it's a bad show if one looks merely at the surface.'

CHAPTER II

JOHN presently fell asleep. Rob, after watching him for a while, lay down himself. He was too tired to sleep, and his mind was racing round and round, like a brute in high fever.

It was nearing the full moon, and he could see the river's gleaming ripples ; the wilderness lay in clear dark outline, the skies were deep and silent, the moon climbing to her height and very brilliant. As he watched, thought seemed to sink down into quietness, or at least exhaustion. At last he was merely gazing, as if fascinated and held.

And it seemed to him that for some reason it was necessary for him to go out into the forest and to cross that river which he could see flinging up miniature waves into golden-glittering light. He had to go out ; he was not clear why, but no doubt he would learn.

He crossed the stream—*antasalila Phalgu* : Phalgu whose water is sunken within, water-

less Phalgu—wading through its softly chuckling coldness and over its firm white sands.

The forest shut in the river as by a wall, hung with creepers like long curtains or tresses, and overcast with a gauzy veil of tiny white flowers, very grey in the moonlight. In the stillness every sound was an explosion.

He had climbed the path where it mounted the further side, and was in the forest again, when he turned to make sure that there was nothing behind him. He was beginning to feel uncertain in that half-darkness ; conscious that he himself was the focus of thousands of eyes that he could not see. He was a reasonably brave man, yet not sure that he was going to be happy, night-wandering without a weapon or a companion.

As he turned, nervousness vanished in astonishment. For he saw emerge from the forest on the other brink a rider coming his way. If a man might feel doubt in a wilderness where he was the only creature, walking blind, still more might a man alone on a horse, with under him the animal senses

gathering in from the very air each whisper of prowling danger. Who would ride out alone in a region infested with beasts of prey, in the hour of their hunger and hunting?

This rider, however, had no fear ; and the horse, though restive and lively, was held in easy control. As they appeared on the sands, behind them showed suddenly another two horsemen, moving lightly and quickly a few paces behind their leader. All three passed the stream, and Alden had barely time to slip aside when they were up to him. Indeed, he could not make himself unseen, he could only turn and face them.

Astonishment deepened. He met faces passionless and dead for ever, yet scarred with the marks of old volcanic hatred. They rode by him, not seeing him, not caring to see him.

The moon shone full on the foremost rider. On a face once lovely but now smallpox-pitted. Her eyes were brilliant, her figure trimly perfect.

Her attendants were young women like herself, and one of them the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

It was not at them that he stared, however, but at their leader. He had seen her once before at close quarters—or rather, had seen her image and verisimilitude, though in lively human fashion and younger. There could be no mistake. It was the rider he had seen in the Calcutta procession, then as now dressed as a cavalry trooper and wearing a *pagri*.

He sank down on a wayside rock, and his eyes followed them. Or would have followed them, except that they had disappeared. They had gone as they had come, soundless, without even the striking of a hoof on the flints of the way.

No more those passion-worn faces shall men's eyes
Behold in life ! Death leaves no trace behind
Of their wild hate !

Death had done its work on them, their day of tumult and misery was over and there could be no return. Why then this image and shadow of return ? He was wrestling with himself, and arguing that what he had seen was against some law to whose divine upholder he appealed.

His eyes opened widely and suddenly.

He found himself seated on Phalgu's

further bank. He was clothed in shorts and khaki shirt. His slippers and stockings were wet through.

Behind him was Jayananda Sadhu, whom he had not seen these five years and longer. He put his palms together to his forehead. Rob answered the salutation, and they made their way to the house.

CHAPTER III

FOR a while they watched the world as it slowly turned over in its slumber. Neither spoke. In the west the moon was sinking, its colour deepened to a rich orange redness. It grew near to dawn.

‘Come!’ said the Sadhu at last. ‘Findlay is ready.’

The sick man’s eyes rested on Rob first, and they smiled. Then they lifted to Jayananda. He held out his hands. ‘This was the last thing for which I was waiting,’ he said.

The shadow of his dream was still on Robin, and his own body an insubstantial thing, itself the shadow of a self that he could not see. The three men were like outlines moving; voices with no reality save sound and words.

The Sannyasi seated himself *virasan*, ‘the hero-posture.’ ‘Your messengers reached

me,' he said to John. 'I was sure Alden would be here also, and I found him on the hill-side.'

They both looked at Rob, who told them of his experience. 'I must have fallen asleep, on that veranda; drugged by the moon, I suppose. The queer thing is, the figure in my dream was dressed like a girl I saw in broad daylight in a procession.'

'Stay over in India for another year,' said the Sannyasi, 'and you may see her again. The Rani of Jhansi rides in half the processions now—anywhere except in a Native State, of course.'

'I suppose that was it. Having seen the procession I saw part of it over again in sleep.'

'Tell me, Alden,' said Jayananda, 'what remains of the countless men and women who have lived and died?'

'Nothing. Unless they have written a book that mattered, or left buildings. Or mounds. Or stone circles.'

'Exactly! Nothing! Unless they have found some expression that frays to dust and powder more slowly than the hand that wrought it does. So every day, and all the

days that man has existed, spirit has been working its will on matter ! Yet only a small part of the spirit that has been working leaves any trace of itself ! ’

‘ I suppose so. ’

‘ Dante leaves a *Divine Comedy*. The savage leaves a stone circle. And the stone circle is the more likely to last out our time and our civilization ! And between the two extremes, of poet and savage, lies in darkness and silence—not leaving a trace—the life and thought and dreams of innumerable millions ! ’

Rob agreed, and quoted, ‘ We are such stuff as dreams are made of ! ’

‘ And when you say *that*, you think you have *dismissed*—not daily ordinary life, which you consider *real* ! but—*dreams* ! ’

‘ They dismiss themselves,’ said Rob. ‘ They flare up and fade out. And no one knows what they mean, or if they mean anything except some disorder in the physical or mental functioning. ’

The dying man’s eyes brightened into a smile. ‘ The Sadhu’s trying to tell you, Rob, that in all this world, since it started, there

has never been any reality except the action of spirit. It is the material that is dying and fading, and not the spiritual. And wherever spirit has once been present, there it is present until the world ends. And you, Rob, have seen——’

‘A dream, as you choose to style it,’ said Jayananda. ‘But tell me! If every Englishman were evicted from England and the place filled up with Hitler’s Germans, do you think the hills and meadows—with all that they carry of the past which has been England!—would not lay hands on all that the newcomers did and thought and all they wanted to do? Do you imagine, then, that *Indian* India has been pushed out by the flitting hybrid India, half here, half gone even while here, which your people have imposed on it?’

‘No,’ said John. ‘Rob knows it hasn’t. It’s here all the time. And there was a time when it laid its hands on us also, as it would still if the machine age had not come to cut us from our roots in earth that was meant to be the spirit’s tabernacle for a space of years. It’s a queer thing, Rob, but our very conquest of

the material has been such as to make us creatures infinitely less substantial and real than we were ! We ourselves have made of ourselves a dream and vision ! ’

‘ And when our generation has gone,’ said Jayananda, ‘ this world which we have made will go also, Alden ! And go so utterly and completely that men will find it stranger to believe that it ever existed, than we find it to believe that Cromwell or Akbar existed ! The machine, and the thoughts and images which it evokes, have in their own hardness and unmysterious clearness the seeds of death ! ’

‘ He is right,’ said John earnestly. ‘ Rob, it will come, it will surely come, that men will find a way to rekindle into vision again the whole life of the past ! that life of spirit which went this way before us, and in appearance vanished utterly ! It lives on, Rob ! woven into the flesh and bone of this eternity of which we are part ! And when that happens, this age of ours will be seen as a fierce sickness from which mankind recovered. One day we are going to be as obsolete as ever the age when men wore chain armour is to us ! ’

‘ I know that,’ said Rob. ‘ I have seen in a

kind of trance men and women who laughed at our clumsy and unreal pictures of what they will *see with their own eyes* ! ’

‘ Yes,’ John agreed. ‘ Men and women are going to despise us because we cared nothing about truth. And they, because they can range over the planet’s whole life from the beginning, and can see past ages as they actually were, in all their valour and horror and misery and beauty, are going to be a humbler, wiser, more imaginative race than this earth has ever borne ! I have seen that age coming, Rob, and there have been times when I myself have lived in its beginnings, because I had withdrawn from the age which was dying, as I was dying.’

‘ Alden,’ said the Sadhu, ‘ saw what he calls a dream, because his busy ordinary self happened to be asleep.’

‘ You saw,’ John explained, ‘ part of that life which once passed this way. I also have seen it. Often and often, until I grew used to it, and walked through it daily. I never asked if it was what we call *real*, for I don’t know what *real* is ; I knew only that it was there, and there all the time. And I know also, Rob,

what is happening to India. The systems we have placed upon her are every day becoming like leaves whose sap is dying out in the twig that joins them to the tree. It used to trouble me, until I saw that a new life was forming within. That new life will show when it is ready to slough off the old altogether. And there's nothing to worry about in its coming, Rob, for the fulfilment of time has brought it ! '

' You could not have expected the world which you yourselves built up through Victoria's reign,' said the Sadhu, ' to last for ever, even if you yourselves had done nothing to hurry it to the abyss ! Alden,' he added, ' has been too long and too much in India ! His mind gets entangled in politics—no matter what he *imagines* he is thinking of ! '

' No,' said Rob. ' I didn't expect it to last for ever. I never even wished it might last for ever. I cared only about the ideas which I thought God meant our Empire to spread for Him through all the world——'

' Such as ? ' asked Jayananda.

Rob faced him unshrinkingly, and stared

hard at him. 'Yes, I am going to show myself up as an intellectual back-number. I suppose you can call me a Liberal, or any term of abuse you like. I fancy you were one once, when you were a servant of the Raj; and even after that, when you were a leader of the Nationalist movement. And I suppose the ideas I thought God was keen to see spread among men and women everywhere were the ideas *I* was keen on. I suppose I made the very common mistake of thinking that my mind was made after the pattern of the Mind that made the universe!'

'Still—tell me, what were the ideas that God meant your British Empire to spread for Him?'

'Courage,' said Alden slowly. 'Honesty, fairmindedness, freedom of thought and speech——'

'And one man one vote,' said the Sadhu, smiling. 'And equal education for all. And and and!'

'They're better than no votes for anyone! and everyone's votes in the hands of the Boss! And better than no education except dope handed out—handed out everywhere!'

in the schools and carefully sterilised textbooks ! in the voice that booms at you over the radio ! in the faces that look out at you from the films ! ’

‘ Yes,’ admitted Jayananda. ‘ If I were still enmeshed in the old things that troubled me, I should say as you do, that the dream which has died was a nobler dream than the one that has followed it. But I am looking to the dream that is coming—which will be nobler than anything dreamed by your Victorian Liberals ! or the Frenchmen who talked about liberty, equality, fraternity ! or the Americans who held that all men are born free and equal, and entitled to certain things, among them the pursuit of happiness ! *all* men, unless they had a dash of the wrong colour in them ! You must forgive me—as one of the men whom you from the anaemic countries choose to call coloured !—just this one flick of—not resentment, Alden, but of reminder to you—and myself’ (he added softly) ‘ that once I felt resentment, with every fibre in my being ! ’

‘ I can say only what I said to you long ago, that you make me feel that I, the English-

man, am sitting naked and defenceless, and not you, the Sadhu ! ’

‘ You and I know ’, said the Sadhu gently, ‘ that the Liberal dream—which was once the dream of each one of us—and which came within an ace of fulfilment !—has gone for ever. Even ten years ago there were many Indians, many even in what you call Extremist circles, who felt a tug of regret at the heart, at thought of passing outside your Empire ! Felt, in fact, much as Saint Paul did about the Roman Empire of which he was so proud a citizen ! But now India has gone the way of Ireland, and regards the Empire as something bogus about to pass swiftly from the scene. But *India* as it was before this evanescence overclouded it fills our thought more and more ! ’

‘ I know. I have found it on this return—not by anything said, but by the air I have breathed, the atmosphere in which men’s spirits move. I have learnt that they are looking beyond us and our administrations, seeing us as an irrelevance ! ’

‘ An irrelevance, truly,’ said the Sadhu. ‘ Yet one that they detest and despise—for

that is the new thing that has happened ! Why does no historian ever notice the images that rise up before people's minds ? and like a ghost, when he blocks your path, drive out vision and thought of everything else ! even though everything else may be what we style *real*, and he nothing but an imagination ! In these stormy years through which we three men have lived in India, our agitators have talked much of the American Revolution, and our American sympathisers have seen in what was happening in India what once happened in America now happening over again—Gandhi as George Washington, and his Salt March like the Boston Tea-Party ! Yet they have not seen the actual frightening resemblance ! When the Revolution came, it was not the taxation without representation that aroused hatred and determination to fight to the death ! It was some psychic image, the shadow cast by eighteenth-century England, which when reflected in the New World made men see red. And in a similar shadow cast to-day in India all the things that loom above us—your Higher Administration, which can talk so glibly, and

to sympathetic hearers so convincingly, of "safeguards," "minorities," and the rest—and our Princes, your Higher Administration's allies—have merged into one composite ogre! All your elaborate pomps and parliaments, your state shikars and social chatter and social exclusiveness—all this, and a thousand things, watched through apathetic generations and now suddenly *seen*, by a generation that has been flung widely awake, have become the Enemy! Our whole being cries out madly, that this Enemy must go! Not in Congress ranks only! Among those who still reluctantly support your Government, as our one sure barrier against civil war, there is as fierce a longing to sweep this creature away as ever men felt at Lexington or Concord! And now you are dying! That is *nothing*!' he exclaimed. 'We know that nations, like individuals, must die! They have no right of perpetuation, and the English have lasted long enough! But you owe it to yourselves—and to the world—to die with dignity! owe it to your historic past! For you have been a great nation! and it soothed our pride to

know that at any rate it was no Italy or Portugal that had beaten us down ! But now the whole world knows——’

His anger died suddenly. ‘ It has shaken my peace as I never thought it could be shaken again ! ’

His troubled face, so unlike the calm they knew, was a thing that troubled them also, and Alden made no answer. The Sadhu, scanning him closely, went on more quietly, ‘ Yet I have come to feel and see, as I never felt or saw formerly, that what is wrong is some failure in my own people, Alden. There has been some moral failure, and the outside world has become aware of this also, as of the moral failure of the West, and of England and America most of all—from whom even those who persuaded themselves that they hated you used to expect so much ! God has called the English to judgment *first*. But he will call your foes and critics to judgment after ! and the time has passed when it will serve for us in India to look too nearly at your faults ! We too have failed, and failed in all except patience and tolerance—which may be, as men of violence say, the badges

of utter weakness, but at any rate have been the merits of India. We have now spent a human lifetime criticising your people, and finding people in other countries who enjoyed the same exercise ; and in the process we have thrown up only our own weakness. But you know well, you two,' he said, and rising he held out both hands to them as he came forward, 'how deeply your own dreams have gone into this Indian brain, that has all these years been trying to dream otherwise, in places where no English foot has ever come but yours ! Think of me then, as I think of you two, not as of someone alien, but someone who has been bound with you in the same queer half-Indian, half-British business that has now nearly finished ! Your people gave us—for a short spell of years—a common public life that covered all India ! so that the man who understood it could go anywhere, from Peshawar to Comorin, and find himself at home ! as in your own Middle Ages, before Europe broke up into tiny nationalisms and religions, an Erasmus could go to Heidelberg, to Rome, to Paris, to Oxford, anywhere ! and everywhere find

himself a citizen ! I have been part of a world which was not all bad, not all ignoble —of a friendship in which some Indians, some Englishmen, had equal place as comrades ! And for the fact that it is broken and finished, and makes way now for something sharper and fiercer and no doubt more exciting, I do not altogether blame your people, nor do I think that history will altogether blame them ! When I am alone, what troubles me is not that ogre of which I spoke, but the failure of my own people—through all these years ! a failure in consistency and honesty of purpose, in courage and fairness ! ’

‘ Yet,’ said Alden, ‘ you are luckier than we are, Vairagi ! You can watch the years passing, and can say, “ It is nothing ! I am looking ahead, to the Age which is to follow ! ” But *I* can’t ! I have to be fussed and worried, right up to the moment when the breath leaves my body, as to whether there is *one* wrong thing, anywhere that my voice or hand can reach, that I can set right. I was brought up to feel that it was *my* business, and that some day an account would

be made with me over it, if anyone anywhere suffered evil, or was allowed to do what was evil. And now,' he said, 'is my philosophy all wrong? I suppose it is true, what men now say, that I and others like me lived by what was not Christianity at all, but a kind of Christian Liberalism, which missed its way badly, at certain times and in certain ways—which gave its enemies a chance to drive it out. All the same, I never made the mistake of imagining that this Christian Liberalism was the same thing as Christianity!'

'Tell me, Alden,' said the Sannyasi with great gentleness, 'what is Christianity—in the opinion of Alden the zealous—yes, and the entirely fearless and fair-minded—philanthropist.'

'It is God's effort—and our effort with Him—age after age, to draw out from all the ages and all the nations a race of spirits whose whole existence and self is one with His.'

'Nothing about creed? And dogma?'

Alden held out his hands. 'You have heard my creed. I have no other. No more and no less! I believe that there is a journey appointed, and that I can get to know the

Master of that journey ; and that like Him I came from God and am going back to God.'

'I think you and I come very near together !' said the Sadhu.

'Yes,' said John. 'That is why we came very near to each other in this life which is almost over for all of us ! We knew that men and women were something whose roots went deep and high, down through all forms of existence, however humble and mean, and right out to God the source and ground and upholder of our life. I know that I am falling into the hands of infinite love and pity now !' said the dying man. 'And, not because I have deserved love and pity, but because I have come to see with His eyes, that love and pity are what He is striving to spread abroad through all worlds, I am going to find myself in the hands of love and pity.'

'Do you believe that, Vairagi?' asked Rob.

'No,' said Jayananda slowly. 'I don't believe it, because—because in Findlay's vision I see something like what you in the West call anthropomorphism. You see in your own minds, and you see in certain other lives—of

men and women, both famous and obscure—qualities which seem to you godlike. You create for yourselves an Eternal Truth which possesses them in perfection—which feels and thinks and plans as well—which strives to find men and women through whom it can win for these qualities a finite expression, throughout all worlds that may exist ! ’

‘ Yes,’ said John, ‘ the world has become a place warm with personal love and understanding and that love and understanding we have found is God.’ He lay back, resting again.

The Sadhu said, ‘ And *we*—have learnt that desire is the root of misery, and of re-birth also. So long as man clings to his idea that he is somehow separate from his fellows, a unique something for whose welfare he must strive against all others, thrusting them down if their presence thwarts him, so long is he in the meshes of *avidya*, ignorance, and *maya*, illusion ! so long will he be driven back into life following life, dragging his chain of accumulated births heavier from age to age—like a slave whose master will in no wise release him ! For myself desire is finished, and all sorrow is over.’

He spoke as if withdrawn into himself, though he knew that his friends were gazing intently at him.

‘ Desire is dead in me also,’ said John. ‘ Nothing remains except contentment with the way that my soul is going.’

They were all now silent. After a while, Rob and the Sannyasi rose, and Rob said, ‘ You must rest now, John. We shall stay near you, and when you have had a sleep we shall return.’

John assented. Then he took Rob’s hand, and said, ‘ Yes, I shall sleep, and it will give me strength for the end when it comes. *Don’t* worry, old man ! You’ve been restless all your days, and God knows that not all the restlessness has been wrong or your own doing.’

CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS sunset, the Goanese woman brought out word that John was awake. The Sannyasi said to Rob, 'It is borne in on me that to-night Findlay will cross the stream, as the Buddhists say.'

Rob said only 'Yes,' and they went in together.

A large fire had been built up, and long shadows flickered on floor and walls. The sick man was breathing hard, and his face was flushed. After a while he signalled that he could talk.

No one had spoken. Yet Rob felt as though there had been an interchange of thinking among the three men there silent together.

Bit by bit also, in that firelit room in Central Indian forest, it seemed to him that they were not alone. There was a moment when John's eyes opened to their widest fulness, and over his face spread a sudden

radiance. From then on, until the end, he was more and more in other comradeship than theirs.

Yet they saw that he was trying to keep with them, that he was trying to speak. They came very near, to miss nothing that he said.

‘ Vairagi,’ said John, ‘ has God raised man to self-consciousness, only to make life a process that ends in the vanishing of that consciousness, for all eternity ? ’

The Sadhu made no answer. Rob knew that the question had been set in terms that he rejected ; knew also that John knew this, but used them because there were no others, and because behind them was a reality to which they served as pointers, which was all that these men needed.

‘ When I was young,’ John continued, ‘ I was wretched at the thought that “ this pleasing anxious being ” might be lost for ever. I was angry at the suggestion that life’s purpose might be to kill this self-consciousness, and to kill the desire within our minds for continued existence. Then I passed through another period when I no longer cared about immortality at all, and saw that

the desire for it was a young man's desire, because he had seen little of life and knew nothing about it. Now I have come to see that what Christ said was what he *meant*, and that we miss our way when we try to give it another meaning which we can accept without any trouble.'

He spoke slowly, and in tones so quiet that only by listening with all their power could his hearers catch them. After a pause he said, 'Rob, when you and I were young, the whole stress was on what we called personality. By which, often enough, we meant something strutting and that rasped on other people !'

John's voice halted, as though it were picking a way through paths now in darkness—dimly, and by slow searching, seen and tested. 'When anyone's personality was taken from us by death, we were desolate, not realising that by clutching at personality and wanting to keep it, in ourselves and others, we were losing our soul, our *self*—losing the self that was laid up for us eternally, in God's idea of us. These fast-passing earth-days are just our chance of getting rid of the false self, the *personality* of which we are so proud ! so

that when we come to die there may be not a vestige left ! And by giving *all*, to get rid of all, everything is made plain and simple ! There is no need to worry any more about our self, our personality, for it takes care of itself ! And when there comes a time when we care no longer whether I, John Findlay—or you, Rob Alden—or you, Jayananda Sadhu—exist or do not exist ! because we have ceased utterly to be interested in that tag of separateness which we once thought made up our self ! then God sees in us that true self which was in His dream for us ! And that self is indestructible, for there is in it nothing that death can lay hold of ! ’

He lapsed into silence again, and they waited listening. And as when we see men and women moving forward to give all that they have, so that those who stand for them and do their work may have strength and resources, so in that room it seemed as if strength were being lent to him, to get spoken what he had to say. He gathered himself together, and made a sign that he could say it.

‘ Christ meant this, I know. And I believe

that Buddha meant it also. All these years men have taught that by Nirvana he taught the total extinction of all consciousness, the snuffing out of the candle which had wavered through so many years of human life. But at last they are beginning to look closer at the few words of his that are left, and to ask if such a mind as his could have found salvation in such a discovery as that. They are right to ask this. For by Nirvana he meant the final extinction of that shadow-self, that self which was given to us for a *beginning* and *only* a beginning—that we might replace it by a self which had no likeness to it, except that it had grown out of it ! Saint Paul meant this also, Rob, when he said that our true self was hid with Christ in God. He meant it when he reminded us that faith and hope stay with us a long while, but that at the end there is nothing left but love. Plato meant it by his Ideas laid up in the life which no man can see, for that life is eternal and with God. *He that saveth his soul shall lose it, and he that loseth his soul shall save it.* That is the Christian truth in a nutshell, and everything else that we say merely glosses and illustrates it ! ’

Kneeling there beside him, Rob thought, 'It was what Christ Himself did, according to Paul. Though He was in the being of God He thought it not a thing to be grasped at to be on an equality with God ! but emptied Himself and took on Himself the shape of a servant, being found in fashion as a man. So that God Himself, to save His soul, His self, had deliberately to lose it !'

Presently they saw that John wanted them to bend yet lower, to catch what he had to say.

'Rob, old friend ! if there was anything I could say—that I knew how to say—that would tell you all you have been to me—I would say it now ! Vairagi ! in you I, John Findlay the Englishman, have been permitted to hold out hands to all your people and have had them taken in love and forgiveness in return ! And, Rob, I want to say this before I go. When we came to India we thought we were shaping our own lives and minds. And you remember how full of plans and dreaming we were ! Those dreams—I can hardly even recall what they were, now that I have come to the end ! But they didn't matter,

old friend ! for, while we were dreaming for ourselves, God Himself was dreaming for us. And why not ? If we are all part of a dream in some Eternal Sleeper's mind, Vairagi, as you and I once half-jestingly said when we were together, then I rest my life—*content*—on a dream which is greater than mine. Rob, for you the dream isn't finished yet ! But from now on I myself shall be a part of the dreaming for the man I loved on this earth. And nothing—*nothing* ! of all the things that fuss and weary you matters, Rob, old man ! What *does* matter is the fact that you have learnt to carry on in loneliness until there has come a time when you do not even look to see if there is any help in any other man, but go forward because not for one moment does any other course occur to your mind ! There are other men—plenty of them !—who make no mistakes that the world can see ! But there are not many whose spirit finds its way and duty without even a pause for reflection, for it made up its mind long ago !' He pressed his friend's hand ; and said slowly and with the smile that Rob would see until all memory faded from the

mind's texture : ' Go thou thy way, thou man greatly beloved ! for thou shalt find *rest* ! and shalt stand in thy lot at the end of thy days ! '

They saw that he was feeling for the Sadhu's hand with his own other hand, and Jayananda took it in his. ' And now—not even faith—not even hope—nothing remains ! for nothing is any more needed ! nothing except the fact that in you two men I have learnt that love is not tied to any race or country, but lives indestructibly between those who have lost their very *selves*—have lost everything that made them separate from others ! '

He released their hands suddenly.

For some hours longer he was breathing, but his eyes were shut. Towards morning the Sadhu rose suddenly from his silence of meditation, bent over him, and said, ' He has gone.'

Alden sprang to his feet. The Sadhu had drawn the lids over the eyes, and the face was at rest.

Taking Alden by the arm, Jayananda led him into the night.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE dawn, Rob found a place in the river's bed, where driftwood had been swept together in masses. For some hours he worked, and built a platform.

In the evening MacNab came, and the three men bore the body out to the pyre. Rob read the service and committal. 'Dust to dust, ashes to ashes.' Scattering river sand on the logs, he commended John Findlay to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ by which he had lived. Then the pyre was lit, and in a moment blazed up fiercely and to a great height, so that they were glad to move to a distance.

Afterwards the Sadhu told Rob he was going.

'Do you mean to say that you are walking through this forest in darkness?'

'I walked through it in darkness when I came. Why not? Night is the best time for travel.'

They stood confronting each other. ' Good-bye, Vairagi ! ' said Alden at last. ' If I can, I will look you up before I leave India. If not——'

' If not—we have been friends ! And, as John said, when the end comes, nothing else matters. Good-bye, Alden my friend ! '

Rob spent most of the night getting together and sorting John's few letters and papers, and making everything ready for his own going. In the morning, very early, he went out to the pyre. Its work had been well done ; he had seen to that when he built it. He scooped up a handful of ashes, and strewed them in the forest, giving John his place in the land where he had lived and died.

As dawn began to brighten, he walked beside the tiny river as it poured chatteringly along the sands. Azure gaities that danced and ran beside it (not dim-glimpsed flashes that vanished, as in his own land), kingfishers were there. Parrots flew on their mad impetuous journeys, so swift and full of mysterious urgency. The veil of night was thinning fast from the creeper-hung walls

that fenced in the lovely secret brook.

His thoughts were the clouds that overhang mortality as its days move closer and closer to their finish. Spirit to spirit drawing in comradeship and mutual necessity ; an intimacy as of flesh and soul established between the mind and the land in which it functions ; understanding coming, of things not seen or handled by the body's organs, and beyond any expression which the voice or pen can find. And the pulling asunder of all this, that has been built up with so much pain and the passing of so many years ; and for each one of us the ever-nearing solitude where we are alone with ourselves and our God.

He went back to the house, and gathered up the few things, relics of the life that was over, which he was taking away. Then he took the path to Pilgrims' Paradise and Vishnugram and England.

But before he took it he stood, and looked out on the hills for the last time. Remembering, as his eyes drank deeply of their beauty and silence and the memories that now were theirs, traditions of the solemn days when the Buddha had moved to his own dying : how

he had gazed 'elephant-fashion' at sites that were dear, and had said, 'This is the last time that I shall look on this': how he had looked out on the forest and said, 'I and my friends, we have lived in many places': and had run lovingly over each place and its special glory and special wonder.

'I and my friends'—the friend whose ashes were on these hills, and the friend whose place of forest meditation he would visit no more. They had lived in many places, and those places he would never forget, in this world or in any other that might follow.

As a setting holds a jewel, these places held the memory of comradeship which was now with eternity.

There slid into his mind some lines from a forgotten poet :

Friend turns from friend his face :

One mourns upon the shore :

But from Thy holy place

Thy sons go out no more !

They had meant something once. Did they mean anything now? He was too tired to tell.

He stood there praying, lips and mind

forming no words but with all their powers feeling out for strength and courage to move onward to life's fulfilment.

He saw the generations flashing into sharpness of outline and utterance ; and fading out again—as the seasons faded out from this wilderness and these mountains. Age after age was expunged and blotted from existence, and each in turn the generations vanished. Yet as he stood there praying he felt sure that around him was an eternal life that would gather up his life also, as it had gathered up his comrade's life, and would save it from being cast away.

Then he took the downward path in earnest, and never turned to look back.

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